

Fragments

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This is a collection of short pieces exploring various philosophical topics.

Contents

[Pyrrhonism](#)

[The Real Pyrrho of Martinsburg](#)

[A Redescription](#)

[Brights, Supers, and Heres](#)

[Human First](#)

[I Believe in Knowing Why I Believe](#)

[Postmaterialist Proverbs](#)

[Pragmatic Liberalism](#)

[World Peace](#)

[What I Have Learned](#)

[Noir Code](#)

[The Casualist Conspiracy](#)

[The Three Freedoms](#)

[The Liberal Spectrum](#)

[Work and Freedom](#)

[Comprehensive Liberalism](#)

[Simple Liberalism](#)

[Justifications for Redistribution](#)

[At the End of All Struggle](#)

[Market Rules](#)

[Utopian Overlay](#)

The Way of the Partial Believer

The Fundamental Mystery

Cela's Symposia

Ownership

How to Preserve Wealth and Power

Use Rights

Scenario

Otsuka's Utopia

Comprehensive Liberalism

An Anarchism

A Visit to a Future

An Anarchy

Completing Liberalism

Kuzminski's Utopia

Job Providers

Theft By Property

Schweickart's Utopia

Arrival

Prospects

Dealing With Rulers

The Mutual

Associations

Rulers of Nature

A Quanta of Activism

Socialisms

Voting

Revolution

A Social Change Strategy

Liberating Configurations

Comprehensive Libertarianism

Best Guess

No Rulers

Free Zones

After the Dust

A Request Economy

Accounts

Use and Property

Back to Basics

Slow Progress

Peaceful Transition

No Domination

No Money

Requests and Use

The Mess We Are In

Politics

Institutions as Declarations

Systems as Interference

Meta Desires

Political Science

Dimensions and Labels

James

Voluntary Contracts

Pragmatic Politics

Summary

Pyrrhonism

Pyrrhonism was founded by the ancient Greek skeptic Pyrrho of Elis. It was a school of philosophy that was intended to provide a practical way of life as opposed to just a theoretical or academic pursuit. The most famous written expression of Pyrrhonism is *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* by Sextus Empiricus. This is a brief handbook that can be viewed as an attempt to provide a similar outline in the language of the early twenty first century.

A Skeptical Narrative

At some point in my life I began to notice that there were many different ways of viewing the world from the one that I had been raised in. There were different religions than mine, different philosophies, cultures, ways of life, obsessions than mine. This unsettled me and set me on a search. What was the one true way? I went through many different attempts to find that one true way. But always these attempts at certainty were eroded away by the awareness of other ways. Also, there were disturbing indications that my search for certainty might be unfounded. Is certainty really possible? I encountered various arguments, from diversity, relativity, assumption, vicious circle, and infinite regress, that called certainty into question. This situation left me in distress. Finally, I don't know exactly why, I just gave up for a moment. I just suspended judgment on absolutes and certainties and relied on everyday practices and practicalities. Unexpectedly, this gave me a kind of peace. I still had this itch for certainty, but in time it died down. I decided that suspending judgment on these absolutes might be the best way for me. I decided to just suspend judgment and rely on practical criteria.

Types of Philosophy

One way of categorizing philosophies is according to how they approach the issue of the one true way, certainty, real knowledge, absolute truth. Dogmatists believe they have found this truth. Nihilists believe there is no such truth. And skeptics suspend judgment and turn to practical criteria. Dogmatists are like skeptics in the sense that they are skeptical of something, namely, views that contradict their dogma. For example, extreme rationalists may think of themselves as skeptics because they are skeptical of religious claims or fringe science, but they are not skeptics in the pyrrhonist sense. They are just counter-dogmatists. Nihilists seem like skeptics because they deny

absolute truth, but they are absolutely sure that it is true that there is no absolute truth. Thus they contradict themselves. Pyrrhonist skeptics try to avoid these contradictions by just suspending judgment on the issue of absolute truth. They do not know how to find absolute truth, so they just abandon that approach and move on to practical issues.

Skeptical Arguments

Skeptical arguments can be general, applied to all truth claims, or specific to one particular issue. One set of general skeptical arguments was first formulated by Agrippa, an ancient Greek skeptic. Updating the terminology a little, they are the arguments from diversity, relativity, assumption, vicious circle, and infinite regress. Suppose I want to determine whether a particular claim is true. First I may notice that there are a diversity of other contradictory claims. How can I know this is the correct claim? Also, this claim may be true relative to the claimant's social position, culture, physical condition, perspective, or other factors, but it might not be true for people in other relative positions. To address this situation, I may look for a criterion to use in proving the claim. But this criterion itself needs proof. To assume it is just an assumption. But if I need to prove it, I need other criteria. But these in turn need proof leading either to a vicious circle or to an infinite regress. Based on these skeptical arguments I do not conclude that there is no truth. I just turn away from this particular game. There does not seem to be any way to win it. Something may come up in the future. Who knows? But for now I will just suspend judgment and move on to practical issues.

Practical Criteria

Sextus Empiricus enumerated several rules of life or practical criteria that the skeptic can use once he or she decides to suspend judgment on absolutes. He listed such things as laws and customs, the guidance of nature, and the practice of the various practical arts. By the guidance of nature he meant our senses and our everyday reasoning abilities. By practical arts he meant such practices as farming, building, medicine, business, and many others. Updating the terminology a little, this handbook uses language, experience, and desire as the practical criteria. It seems that language, experience, and desire are the basics that we start from in everyday life and that it is very difficult to imagine going beyond them. Other aspects of life seem to be just configurations of these basics. And it seems that we can go very far with these criteria without the need for an absolute justification because we make no absolute claims about them. We just

say that we find them useful. If we did try to give them an absolute warrant, we would immediately come up against the skeptical arguments.

Talking About Truth

Even though we as skeptics suspend judgment on absolute truth, we still need a way of talking about truth issues. Sextus Empiricus elaborated various skeptical formulas. These were ways of talking when confronted with truth claims or asked to make a statement about truth. These included phrases like "perhaps or perhaps not", "I determine nothing", "I suspend judgment", "maybe or maybe not". These are ways of talking when dealing with dogmatic statements about absolute truth. But the word "truth" can be used in various ways. It can be used in everyday conversation to express agreement: "Ain't that the truth!" It can be used to ask about experiences: "Isn't it true that you saw Mister Jones enter the store at 8 AM on April 9th?" It would not be particularly useful to say, "I determine nothing" when you did see Mister Jones and you are just reporting your own personal experience. Also, it may be awkward to preface every assertion with "it appears" or "it seems to me". Pyrrhonism was criticized as impractical by people who confused the two issues of statements of dogma and reports about personal experience. The skeptic will suspend judgment on dogma and use "perhaps" or "maybe" or "I suspend judgment" or simply "I don't know" about such things, but for practical discussions, the skeptic can be very comfortable saying, "That is true" when reporting experiences or expressing agreement.

Practicing LED

It can be convenient to refer to the practical criteria, language, experience, and desire, using the acronym LED. This can then be elaborated into a practical set of tools and terms to use for problem solving while suspending judgment on absolute truth, certainty, grand narratives, or other things that seem to be beyond our knowledge. Here is some jargon that may be useful.

LED. A philosophy, religion, path, conceptual tool, and method of self improvement and problem solving. An acronym standing for language, experience, and desire. Language includes natural and artificial languages and texts. It also includes nonverbal languages and texts such as dance, body language, images, movies, etc. Experience includes passive observation as well as action, inner as well as outer experience, emotions, feelings, intimations, the whole vast realm of

human experience. Desire includes the whole realm of wants, needs, likes, dislikes, goals, motives, etc. LED implies that we are limited to language, experience, and desire and also that there is no one, true configuration of language, experience, and desire. Finding the one, true configuration would be just another configuration, *ad infinitum*.

Configuration. A particular pattern of language, experience, and desire. Life seems to be just a series of such configurations. Also, religions, cultures, societies, histories, situations, worlds, etc. seem to be such configurations.

L work. Exploration, study, and just enjoyment of the whole realm of languages and texts, looking at their diversities and similarities, relationships, etc. in order to understand how language is used, what the possibilities are, and different ways of expressing things, to find coherent theories, to stimulate the imagination, and to just enjoy the play of language, of stories and songs, of patterns and structures. Performance, creation, reading, writing, conversation, inner dialog, mining unspoken assumptions and programming.

LE work. Testing texts against experience. Finding texts to describe or express experience. Finding texts that predict experience or provide reliable maps. Correcting harmful inner commentary through experience testing. Exploring and mapping out new experiences.

E work. Developing simple mindfulness and awareness. Letting go of descriptions and desires and just experiencing the flow. Following your breath, walking, etc. without comment or desire. Enjoying the moment.

ED work. Goal directed action. Following a plan. Executing a program. Following the steps. Getting things done.

LD work. Finding ways to express the whole complexity of desire. Developing a useful nomenclature.

D work. Understanding your desires. Finding the contradictions and inconsistencies. Untangling the knot. Deciding which desires to keep or add and which to give up. Learning to desire things within your control. Values clarification. Goals clarification. Selecting higher

desires and giving up lower desires. Simplifying your desires. Elaborating your desires. Refining your desires. Moderating your desires.

LED work. Putting all the other elements together. Finding a coherence of language, experience, and desire that will work for you and bring you a reasonable degree of happiness and satisfaction. Also, more narrowly, finding a configuration for a particular situation that meets requirements. Problem solving. If you are not happy or something is not working, change the experience to conform to desire, change the desire, or change how you view the problem, or some combination of these.

Skeptical Inquirers and Debunkers

The term skeptic is often used today as a self-designation for a group of people who are fighting what they view as superstition, irrationality, and pseudo-science. They provide a useful service in investigating various fringe claims, but some of them also seem to be putting forward science as some sort of absolute truth and trying to limit experience to just the sort of sense experience that can be shared in public. It could be that science as a practice may choose to limit its domain to only those types of experiences, but we human beings have many experiences beyond that. There is more experience than science can pin down. It may be vague and hard to quantify, but it is still experience. From a pyrrhonist point of view, science is a useful tool for the social production of texts that have been well tested against experience and that can be used to predict future experience and to design technological artifacts, but we would have to suspend judgment on whether science is the only truth. Science is a particular set of configurations of language, experience, and desire. It is a set of social practices and texts. It may be the best tool we have for solving certain kinds of problems and should be used for that purpose, but it cannot replace religion as the source of authoritative truth.

Arguments from Authority

It is common practice to appeal to some authority, whether a religious prophet, a charismatic leader, some privileged text, or science, as the final source of truth, to be accepted without question. But this begs the question of how we know that authority is an authority. By what criteria do we decide? This immediately leads into skeptical arguments. It may be practical to accept some person or some text as a useful source of suggestions, practices, or information, beyond what

we know ourselves, but there is a serious problem in giving unquestioned acceptance to an authority just because they have been in some way put into that position. It can also be a practical danger as shown by suicide cults and world wars.

Postmodernism as Skepticism

Postmodernism can be defined as skepticism about grand narratives or metanarratives. It also emphasizes diversity and relativity. It could be seen as skepticism using linguistic tools. Postmodernism does not necessarily have the same goals of providing a practical philosophy of life that pyrrhonist skepticism does, but it does share many of the same concerns and approaches. Postmodernism could be seen as providing a set of tools and arguments that skeptics can use out past the linguistic turn. On the other hand, PoMo can become a sort of dogmatism, so the skeptic must be a little wary.

Pragmatism as Skepticism

Pragmatism can be defined as an emphasis on using practical consequences for making judgments about texts or programs. This fits in very easily with skepticism's practical criteria approach. Also, pragmatism has emphasized pluralism and diversity. This fits in well. Skepticism will just part company when pragmatists try to say that they have the correct definition of truth in opposition to the correspondence or coherence theorists. For the skeptic, truth is first and foremost a word. It can be useful to use the word in a pragmatic, correspondence, or coherence sense depending on circumstances and goals. Pragmatists have also criticized skepticism, but this has been in the "Pyrrho falling into a ditch" vein of criticism that falls away once you understand the distinction between suspending judgment on absolutes and living everyday life using practical criteria.

Skeptical Politics

Pyrrhonism has been accused (like postmodernism) of implying political conservatism. This was because Sextus Empiricus suggested following the laws and customs of your country given the difficulties in coming up with an absolute standard of morality or social organization. The issue though is what "country" we are talking about. Replace "country" with "culture" or "subculture" and things open up quite a bit. You could be a member of a conservative or liberal subculture. The problem comes when we get to subcultures that require absolute submission to some dogma, such as dialectical materialism. Political movements that depend on their members

towing some doctrinal line will be naturally suspicious of skeptics. But a skeptic can have their own personal reasons for wanting to promote freedom, justice, and democracy or for protecting the privileges of landlords or corporations depending on their personal history and desires. Skepticism itself does not lead to one place or the other, except that it does lead away from political subcultures that depend on dogma as opposed to just common desires.

Skeptical Morality

Skepticism sees the basis of morality in desire and social membership and human experience. I try to be fair because I want to be fair, because I want to be treated fairly, because fairness is needed for my society to function, and because human history has shown that a lack of fairness leads ultimately to rebellion and disorder which I also would like to avoid. I can also choose to use terms like "good", "bad", and "right" in these contexts. Where I run into a problem as a skeptic is moral absolutes. Even though I strongly desire justice, I cannot see how to provide an absolute warrant for justice. It is just something that we humans usually want to have. It becomes more murky when we get into sexual morality. If I have entered into some social contract called heterosexual marriage that involves monogamy, I feel some obligation to live up to my contract. Also, I am motivated by love for my partner. On the other hand, I can imagine other arrangements that could also work well and other ideas about gender and sexual interaction that could be desirable and safe and stable. So I had best keep an open mind.

Skeptical Religion

Skepticism has trouble with religious dogmatism, appeals to authority, exclusivism, and intolerance, but it does not necessarily have a problem with religious experience, rituals, stories, practices that accept the limits of language, experience, and desire. The problem with religion is dogma. Religious texts can be understood as art, rule books, meditation manuals, and expressions of religious experience without claiming to be the one and only truth. Religions are, as best we can tell, human creations. They are human subcultures that a skeptic may choose to belong to. But the skeptic will be chased away by dogmatism and authoritarianism. A skeptic may have certain mystical experiences, but he or she cannot tell if this indicates a transcendent being. It may be possible that a prophet has experienced God, but a skeptic cannot know without experiencing God for themselves and comparing notes. Even then the experience is likely to be highly ambiguous. Just accepting the prophet's statement on

authority will not work.

Skeptical Science

Skepticism has little problem with science as the social production of texts that are well tested against publicly accessible sense experience and that are useful for tentatively predicting future publicly accessible sense experience. Science is the main source of knowledge in this sense. The problem comes in when science presumes to provide the authoritative truth about the real world. Then we fall into skeptical arguments. As long as it stays in the area of practical criteria, we love it. There also may be some benefit in expanding science into some more ambiguous areas of experience beyond publicly accessible sense experience, paranormal experiences, near death experiences, etc., as long as we don't get too carried away.

Skeptical Humanism

A skeptic may choose to be a humanist in the sense of wanting to promote humanist themes such as freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, science, artistic expression, and an emphasis on the human as opposed to a supernatural that is beyond human experience. A problem comes in though in that many humanists consider some form of scientific materialism or scientific naturalism to be a required doctrine of humanism. A skeptic would tend to suspend judgment on these metaphysical doctrines while making use of science as a social practice giving useful results rather than as the only source of truth. So it may be useful for skeptics who would like to move in the humanist camp to define themselves as skeptical humanists, that is, people who like the humanistic values while suspending judgment on scientific materialism as a dogma and instead using the practical criteria approach.

Pyrrhonist Societies

It is definitely not necessary to join a broad life style group to be a skeptic. Still there may be some benefits to joining a group that promotes and supports a particular philosophy of life. Pyrrhonist societies could be formed to teach and promote pyrrhonist skepticism and to provide a social group through gatherings for lectures, discussions, mutual aid, child education, life cycle ceremonies, and seasonal celebrations. On the other hand it may be more practical to get such social interaction on the liberal fringes of some religious group or in a humanist or ethical culture group. Then again, some skeptics may not feel the need for much social support beyond simple

citizenship, family and friends, and membership in special purpose groups such as political parties, issue groups, or recreational clubs.

The Real Pyrrho of Martinsburg

One late summer morning I headed out on assignment for the local paper to put together a human interest piece about a local "character" who was starting to get a little outside exposure.

To get the full experience, I drove north out of Newark on Martinsburg Road, a small country road curving through the small hills we have here at the start of the Appalachian plateau.

Many of the fields were covered in late summer wild flowers like goldenrods and dark purple iron weed. I finally drove by a few Amish farms and into the small town of Martinsburg, a few square blocks of houses with a small restaurant, a gas station, a post office, a small Church of Christ painted white in the way of many of these rural churches, and a graveyard on the edge of town.

Continuing north out of town and down a few township roads I came to a mail box with the name "Pyrrho" on it in small black letters. I turned into a wooded area of about 20 acres and down a gravel driveway to a parking area for maybe five cars under some old ash and maple trees. Close by was a poll barn type out building with a detached wood deck close by and a small trailer home a little further off close to a fairly large vegetable garden.

I was greeted by a man in his late sixties in jeans and work shirt with a big grey beard who reminded me for all the world of Walt Whitman sauntering out. But his hair was short, unlike those pictures of the old Walt Whitman, and he had on metal frame glasses and wore tennis shoes.

We exchanged some friendly small talk, and he gave me a tour. The out building had a small store in the front, then a work area and office behind that with some evidence of shipping materials. At the back were two bedrooms with their own entrances and small decks.

We settled down on some white plastic lawn chairs on the large deck close to the out building with some bottles of iced tea from the store.

Reporter: Let's start with the basics. How did you get a name like Pyrrho?

Pyrrho: Well, my real name is Jacob. I started calling myself Pyrrho many years back because of some reading I was doing.

Reporter: Don't people think it's kind of strange and have a hard time pronouncing it?

Pyrrho: Well, they may think it's strange, but they got used to it. I pronounce it PIE-ROW. Maybe they just think it's because I sell some of the Amish baked pies here sometimes to the tourists. [He winked.]

Reporter: You get tourists out here?

Pyrrho: Oh, a few. I do a little bed and breakfast business and I get some people who come out here for life retreats.

Reporter: Life retreats?

Pyrrho: To examine their lives. You know, an unexamined life is not worth living. [He smiled.]

Reporter: You get people interested in that?

Pyrrho: Oh, you'd be surprised.

Reporter: And you're what? Socrates?

Pyrrho: No, I'm Pyrrho. [Another smile.]

Reporter: OK. The reason I came out is because of this Web site about you. I understand that you just turned over the rights to some of your writings.

Pyrrho: Well, I thought those young folks might be able to do something with it.

Reporter: But what if they make money off it?

Pyrrho: Money? Off that stuff? If they can pull that off they are welcome to it.

Reporter: You don't care?

Pyrrho: Why should I? I'm doing OK here.

We talked some more, but not much about poetry or philosophy. Mostly about his mail order business, its ups and downs. And about some problems he was having with his garden. He sent me off with a big bag of squash and zucchini.

A Redescription

Look at the sequence of configurations of language, experience, and desire that make up your life. They are transient. You can see no permanent self behind them. Many lead to suffering.

Suffering configurations lack a harmony of language, experience, and desire. So train yourself to let go of such configurations and to turn to those that reconcile language, experience, and desire. Learn to suspend language and desire at times and to rest in the simple flow of experience.

Be mindful. Examine your views. Cultivate positive configurations. Let go of negative configurations. Cultivate compassion, serenity, joy. Refrain from taking life. Refrain from taking what is not given. Refrain from sexual misconduct. Refrain from false speech. Refrain from intoxicants.

Walk your path calmly. Be relaxed and natural. Be practical. Do not worry about what other people think of you. Do your work without attachment. Be free from possessions and status, fortune and loss, success and failure. Do what you really want to do ethically and well. Face death without regret.

Brights, Supers, and Heres

Labels can be a real problem. On the one hand, they can be very useful little shorthand devices. Rather than having to spend a lot of time on subtle distinctions and variations, you can more quickly decide what you need to know to navigate your way in the world. They can also be nifty little tokens of group membership. Most of us want to belong somewhere, and with a short, "I am an X", we can often successfully group ourselves.

This can work out fine as long as those subtle variations and distinctions don't really matter, or as long as the label doesn't have negative consequences. In some places "apostate" can be a death sentence, despite whatever reasons and distinctions there might be. In other circles, being "religious" can make people take you less seriously.

Consider "atheist". By taking on such a label, people may assume you are arrogant, immoral, untrustworthy, and a royal pain. You might immediately exclude yourself from public office, or even some jobs. Some people might not want to associate with you, despite whatever other things you might have in common, like being a bluegrass fan or a bridge player. Some people might actually *fear* you as if you are there to steal their precious faith from them. All this, when gods are not even a concern of yours. Yet you have felt the need to label yourself in opposition to all the theists bristling about.

Enter the Brights. A bright is a person who has a naturalistic worldview, free of supernatural or mystical elements. At first they did not have an antonym to "brights", but now "super" is in use. They define a super as a person who *does* include supernatural or mystical elements in their worldview.

The Brights trying to define their own label is very understandable. All the existing labels that might do have so much baggage. Many of them lead to ideological disputes that seem just besides the point. On the other hand, the Brights see that they are at a social and political disadvantage, much like gays have been. In many ways the Brights movement is not so much about ideology as rights and giving people the courage to come out of the closet about their unpopular worldview, which may not be that unpopular after all.

But, as always, there is a problem (other than the unfortunate association of "brights" with "being bright" and the tendency of people to see this as a claim to superior intelligence). The problem is inherent

in the whole enterprise of label making. The Brights had to choose some words to define their label, in particular, "naturalistic", "supernatural", and "mystical". Then they go on to say that everyone is either a bright or a super. (See [Synopsis](#).)

Too bad they had to come up with an antonym and then group everyone else under that antonym. They did not like to be labeled by the issue of "god", as if that were the only issue, and now they are labeling everyone according to their stand on "naturalistic", "supernatural", and "mystical". And these terms are most problematical if you really try to pin down what they mean in concrete terms.

There is much that can be said about this, but let's just consider the distinction between methodological naturalism and metaphysical naturalism. Metaphysical naturalism states that only the "physical world" exists. Methodological naturalism suspends judgment on the metaphysical issues and just proposes to study any phenomena using the same general approach of systematically testing texts against our experiences. If there are any agents without physical bodies, then they will be studied using these same methods. So there could be entities that the Brights are calling supernatural or mystical, but if so, then the only way we human beings can study them is from where we are in our concrete, human situation.

Getting into the spirit of coining new labels, let's define a here as a person who starts from where they are, in their concrete, human situation of language, experience, and desire. We can say, "I am a Here" and talk about the Heres. Why not?

So the world cannot be conveniently divided into Brights and Supers. There are also Heres. For Heres, the terms "naturalistic", "supernatural", and "mystical" are very hard to pin down and may not be that relevant as ways to distinguish people into groups. The Heres can appreciate the social situation of the Brights and wish them well in their coming out exercise. They may have much in common with Brights in the methods they think are most useful in investigating our experiences. On the other hand, they can also respect the "mystical" paths of some religious people, although they might be very uncomfortable with religious fanaticism and exclusivism since they seem to be based on very weak evidence, if any at all.

There seems to be a tendency to exclude the middle in the Bright camp. Everyone who is not a Bright is in the same bucket, the Supers. This goes along with the denigration of religious moderates as being "just as bad" as the religious extremists or in some way facilitators of

religious extremists because they do not go all the way over to a "naturalistic worldview, without supernatural or mystical elements". If religious moderates do give cover for religious fanatics and extremists, they should stop doing that, but it is not useful to divide the world into just two big groups, or even three. There are many more than that.

Human First

Whatever may be true about my beliefs, I can only approach them as a human being, in my own concrete and limited human situation.

However much I may think my beliefs should be embraced by all, I must recognize that we live in a world of diverse belief systems.

However dedicated I am to what I believe, I must recognize that as a human among humans I may not be seeing the whole truth and therefore a certain amount of humility is needed.

We need some common ground. Basic human compassion and practicality are a good place to start.

This common ground should apply to all, even people in my own group. I must have the courage to insist on at least this much.

I Believe in Knowing Why I Believe

Here is a belief. The belief in belief should end. That is, the belief that belief as belief has value in itself and should be protected from challenges should end.

But we all have beliefs. If we didn't have beliefs we would be paralyzed and could not act. Our actions in the world are based on a set of beliefs that we carry around with us as guides for action. If we didn't have these beliefs, we would not be able to take a single step.

So beliefs are necessary, but which beliefs? First, we need to clear up some issues with how the word "believe" is used. First, there are two main forms, "believe in" and "believe that".

Let's take "believe that" first. When we say that we believe that something, we are making a truth claim. We are making a prediction that some kind of experience will happen. If this kind of belief is well tested against experience and for coherence with other beliefs that are well tested against experience, we may even venture to call it knowledge. But even here, it is subject to possible revision based on future experiences and challenges.

When we say that we believe *in* something, it is a sort of endorsement. That is, we are recommending something as a guide for action. It might be an expression of desire. For example, "I believe in compassion" and "I believe in destruction" are both expressions of desire, that I would like to see compassion, or destruction. But I could also say that I believe in science or that I believe in a holy book. When I say I believe in science, I could simply be saying that I believe that science is a useful tool for predicting and controlling experience. Then the belief in science can be played out in the rough and tumble of concrete practice. When I say I believe in a holy book, I often mean that when it expresses desires (like rules and commands) I endorse those as a good guide for action and that when it states claims about experience, those claims will be shown to be true in actual experience. But my belief in the holy book could take a softer form. It could mean simply that it is good guide for action when interpreted within a community in particular ways.

So believing in something is most often simply an endorsement of some desire or some guide for action. The reasons why we endorse it need to be made clear. The most common reason is because authorities such as our parents or community leaders endorse it. Or it

could be because "everyone" believes in it. There are many times when accepting an endorsement from someone else who we trust makes sense. But we should have reasons to believe that they have good reasons, like personal experience or expertise in a well tested set of texts. We need to be aware that the authorities in turn may only be carrying forward an endorsement from other authorities in the past. And who knows how the chain of endorsement started. Because of this weakness, the authorities sometimes claim that the endorsement chain ends with an invisible agent, and that it would be in our best interest to accept what that invisible agent says without question. This seems to combine an unverifiable claim with a threat, but it still comes down to an endorsement, "or you will be sorry".

Given this situation it is tempting to say that it is always wrong to believe anything without good evidence. We should just suspend judgment until enough evidence is in. This is a good conservative policy for minimizing errors and extreme actions. Because once we loosen the connection to justification, history has shown that people may be "guided" to some truly terrible acts.

On the other hand, if we were to really suspend judgment on all beliefs until all the evidence is in, we could become paralyzed and unable to act. Sometimes we need to make working assumptions and just act. But there is danger here of doing something truly unfortunate based on just a working assumption.

So here is my recommendation: Know what degree of justification your beliefs have and give greater priority to beliefs that are well justified. Beliefs that are well tested against experience and are coherent with other well tested beliefs have the highest justification. Then there are beliefs you get from others who you trust to have done the testing. Then there are beliefs that are at least plausible, that is, they are at least in line with more justified beliefs. It goes on from there on down to situations in which there is very little to go on but feelings and intuitions but you nonetheless have a real need to act and must make working assumptions. In such cases, going with beliefs that your family and community have found useful may be the way to go, if they are not contradicted by more well justified beliefs.

One more type of belief needs to be fit into this recommendation, that is, those cases where "believe in" is an expression of desire, like "I believe in compassion". There is no way to test desires directly against experience. Here is where a working assumption is needed. I assume that most people want some basic things, like survival, enjoyment, and group membership. Since I also share these basic desires, I justify

my desires by how well they help meet these most basic desires. This usefulness then becomes an empirical question, and I feel justified in saying that a belief in compassion is much more justified than a belief in destruction.

Now how justified is this recommendation itself? That depends on goals. Why do I feel the need to make such a recommendation? I feel such a need because of the problems that belief can cause. This has become all to painfully evident recently with suicide bombers, but belief has always been a problem, preventing systematic investigation, limiting freedom, and fomenting violence. In particular, religious belief has had a very mixed record. The recommendation from such books as *The End of Faith* by Sam Harris, *Breaking the Spell* by Daniel Dennett, and *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins is to end belief that cannot be well tested. So in the range of justification I describe above, they would say that we should just do away with belief beyond some point when the justification becomes too weak. They would justify this recommendation by pointing to all the harm that such unjustified or weakly justified beliefs do.

So, for example, they are critical of the so called religious moderate. I would define a religious moderate as someone who in effect takes my recommendation in that they do allow themselves some weakly justified beliefs because of their strong intuition that there is something more and a strong need to explore that something more, but they would give preference to better justified beliefs in concrete action. For example, basic human compassion and practicality would prevent them from bombing innocent people because of their beliefs. Now I may be overstating their case a little. Probably, it would be more correct to say that my recommendation would be more in line with the approach of religious liberals, but I would also claim that religious moderates operationally follow the recommendation even if they do not want to admit or recognize the weak justification their treasured religious beliefs may have.

So the justification for my recommendation is a "don't throw out the baby with the bath water" justification. I largely accept the arguments of these authors for the human nature of religion and the potential harm of religious belief. But I do not think that we need to do away with religion to reduce the dangers of religion. We just need to know what we are doing when we accept beliefs that do not have good empirical justification and why we are doing it - because we want to explore and be open to the "something more" and because of the good that comes from religion. But at the same time we recognize the dangers and make sure we give preference in action to the beliefs that

are better rooted and grounded in our common human experience.

Postmaterialist Proverbs

Beyond a basic economic foundation, consumption is optional.

Success is earning our economic foundation doing what we want to do, or earning that foundation in less and less time.

Success is more time to do what we want rather than more things.

Time is our greatest possession.

There is great freedom in not caring what other people think you should have.

Buy this! I don't think so. Buy this now! I think I'll wait. Buy! Buy! Buy! I'll decide what I really want and need.

Marketing can't be escaped, but it can be laughed at.

Question messages.

If manipulation does not work, marketers will resort to information.

Literalize marketing messages.

Shopping is problem solving.

Thrift is rebellion.

Efficiency for materials, carnival for cultures.

Growth areas for the futurist: efficient technologies, quality basics, enabling tools for the masses, non-material culture.

A liberal democratic market system must ultimately follow votes and demand.

There is no other place to go. Other systems always devolve to control by the few. And we can't trust the few.

No great revolution, many small revolutions. Not top down, bottom up. Not force, choice.

Change demand and the system will follow.

Assign the true total cost to products.

We need to give the machine something else to crank on.

Pragmatic Liberalism

We are limited to various configurations of language, experience, and desire.

No one has any inherent authority over anyone else.

Define basic freedom as not being subjected to force or fraud and effective freedom as having the resources to do something.

Having authority then means the right to limit the basic or effective freedom of others.

Since no one has any inherent authority over anyone else, no one has the right to limit the basic or effective freedom of others.

On the other hand, no one has the right to demand their rights from others since rights are not inherent, but are defined within a social context.

This situation naturally leads to conflict and inefficiency, so we need a social contract. Rights can be defined and protected only within the context of a social contract.

Maximum basic freedom and adequate effective freedom for all seems like a reasonable compromise.

However, effective freedom can reduce the basic freedom of others if it is accomplished by forcing them do something they don't want to do.

Ideally, effective freedom will come if basic freedom is emphasized and people find their own ways to do what they want without interfering with others.

But adequate effective freedom needs to remain in the social contract in case this does not work in some cases.

Transitions to greater basic freedom need to emphasize the protection of individuals from force and fraud, especially from powerful economic interests, the creation of true free markets by eliminating corporate subsidies and providing adequate information to consumers, and cushioning the impact of the changes on the weak and the poor.

Politics is finding the least objectionable practical means to implement

a social contract.

World Peace

Peace requires at least a minimum of agreement.

We must investigate our common reality without bias or imitation so hopefully we will converge on some common knowledge.

We must have a strong dedication to the unity of the human family, a unity that allows for and celebrates diversity.

Religion must play its central role as a force for compassion and fellowship, not conflict and hatred.

Religion and science must not waste time and effort in conflict with each other.

Prejudice of all kinds must be eliminated so that we can get to know each other with open minds and hearts.

The rich must voluntarily help the poor, to reduce conflicts caused by greed and despair.

We must assure the equality of men and women and equal rights for all people.

We must have a common secondary language so that we can all understand each other.

We must encourage education at all levels both as a means of wealth creation and of mutual understanding.

We must have a mechanism for global collective security that can enforce peaceful conflict resolution and prevent any nation from attacking another.

What I Have Learned

We each find ourselves in our own concrete human situation.

It seems to be various configurations of language, experience, and desire.

Our life seems to be a sequence of such configurations.

We find ourselves dependent on each other and on our natural environment.

And yet we are free and must choose.

We fear our freedom and our dependency and seek security in systems.

And yet systems often fail us and seem arbitrary and absurd.

So we test our systems and patch them and make them better.

Or we wage war against anything that seems to endanger our favorite system.

Or we make our solitary way, gaming the systems we have no say in.

We need playfulness to set the wisdom of our systems free.

We need tested texts that we can rely on until we get something better.

We need a balance of freedom and mutual assistance.

Noir Code

I am trapped here. I have no control of my world. Power is an accident, but it can hurt you. I don't respect authority. I am not cowed. I am free, though forced to be free. I sympathize with the others. I respect freedom. I help the weak. I resist slavery. I deceive the slave masters. But I am alone, I can't rely on them. I am detached, ironic, self-contained. I am shaky, neurotic, eccentric. I don't care what you think of me. I offer my services. I am good at what I do. I take pride in it. I follow my own private contract. I don't explain myself. Think of me as a tool. I doubt I will be treated fairly. I prepare for trouble. I am trapped here. I have no control of my world. I plan my escape.

The Casualist Conspiracy

This may be the most pervasive movement you have never heard of, by design. The Casualists are conducting an "invisible revolution", at least their part in it is invisible to most of us. They don't want to stand out, or even be noticed. They are just there, hidden in plain sight.

Casualists operate, like many underground movements, as a loose confederation of independent cells, with no central coordination, although their cell meetings may appear to be just dinner parties, or reading groups, or fishing trips.

They rarely explain themselves. They appear to conform through a process of "conversational blending". They see much of social interaction as just linguistic practices. They play their role and don't see a need for their role to match precisely their own inner beliefs. These social rituals are to them just tokens of group membership, of friendliness toward people, most of whom they like and sympathize with.

They are postmaterialist, postideological, pragmatic individualists. They value freedom for themselves and for others. They are also master manipulators of the memesphere, often operating through proxies, who are glad to make some noise while the Casualists look indulgently on, maintaining their operative stance, their ironic distance from the true believers.

As postmaterialists, they are not much motivated by money or possessions. They may be rich or poor, depending on their circumstances, although most are somewhere in the middle. They see work as simply a means to an end and seek to do "just enough", although they may have their own projects and enthusiasms that happen to overlap with their work.

Their origins are somewhat obscure. Some may see them as a kind of genetic subspecies, but their differences are best explained as the result of a distinct, self-replicating subculture, extending back into prehistory.

They are not just a personality type, since they show evidence of group action. Neither are they a secret society, although it is believed that they may have resorted to that in some particularly difficult historical periods. In each generation, they keep watch for candidates to recruit into their cells, and within that context they pass on their

goals and methods.

What do they want? Just for their subculture to survive and spread to receptive candidates. As for the others, they leave them alone, intervening in the background only when needed to diffuse the most dangerous and fanatical, playing them if necessary, befriending them if possible, and hoping for everyone to just calm down and enjoy life.

The Three Freedoms

No one has any inherent authority over anyone else, so no one is justified in initiating force against anyone else. We are free, only limited by the freedom of others.

We are free to choose whatever way of life we want as long as we don't use force on others. We are free to associate or not associate with others as long as these associations are voluntary. We are free to access the natural resources we need as long as we don't prevent others, including future generations, from accessing the resources they need.

That is, we each have three basic freedoms, personal freedom, social freedom, and natural freedom.

Expressed in terms of ownership, we each own our own person, life, and work, and we own what we acquire through voluntary exchanges with others, but no one owns nature, or alternatively, we all have equal ownership of nature.

This seems like a reasonable theoretical starting place, but there is already a lot of history behind us that strongly influences any practical starting place. We have to find a transition that takes this into account and does not make matters worse.

One compromise would be to respect current patterns of ownership while at the same time taxing the use of natural resources beyond subsistence use and using these funds to pay a basic income to each person. This compromise would be administered by an association dedicated to protecting our freedoms and managing our common natural heritage.

Such an association would not require members to agree on any particular comprehensive doctrine. A pluralism of comprehensive doctrines can work as long as there is an overlap that respects the personal, social, and natural freedom of others and allows for pragmatic problem solving within a minimally common region of language, experience, and desire.

But even this level of compromise will likely be a long time coming, so in the mean time it would be good to support policies that protect and expand freedom, that protect natural resources and move toward taxing their use, and that provide parts of a basic income to each

person, such as health care, education, and a basic economic safety net.

The Liberal Spectrum

Comprehensive Liberalism - maximum personal, social, and natural freedom consistent with the same freedom for others (AKA Left Libertarianism)

Egalitarian Liberalism - maximum personal and social freedom consistent with the same freedom for others and with equal opportunity and equal access to the basics of life

Classical Liberalism - maximum personal and social freedom consistent with the same freedom for others and with private ownership of nature justified by theories of original appropriation (AKA Libertarianism or Right Libertarianism)

Conservatism - maximum personal and social freedom consistent with the same freedom for others and with selected traditional or religious values and usually with private ownership of nature

Egalitarian Authoritarianism - extensive limitations on freedom justified by the goal of maximum social and economic equality (AKA State Socialism or Communism)

Comprehensive Authoritarianism - extensive to complete limitations on freedom in submission to a selected center of authority, sometimes benevolent, but often not (Fascism, Monarchy, Theocracy, etc.)

Work and Freedom

Work is the expenditure of energy over time. Our life is a sequence of configurations of language, experience, and desire that takes energy to sustain. So a fundamental fact of life is that we need to take in at least as much energy as we consume. Food is our energy source. Clothing, heat, and shelter help us to conserve our energy and to protect our body from damage.

The simplest form of work is hunting and gathering, when we have direct access to natural resources that can be converted directly to our use for survival. We can usually save up some resources either in our body, in artifacts that we created before, or in food caches. This allows us times where we are free from the need to work. We are still expending energy over time, but we are doing what we want, so it is not work in the sense that we usually use the term.

Subsistence agriculture does not change this situation much. We still have direct access to the resources that we work with to produce what we need to live. The situation begins to change as trade becomes more important. We start to exchange some of what we have produced with others. Some people become specialized and removed from the basic resources they need to survive. They only get them through exchanges with primary producers. Still, they do have the option to go "back to the farm" if they cannot survive by selling their specialized products and services.

But eventually we get to the situation where the option of going back to primary production is no longer there. We are totally dependent on the market to sell our products and services. By this time the value of past production is often stored as money.

Add to this a situation in which all the land is owned, that is, the use of land is the exclusive right of certain landlords, then we have to pay rent just to have the resources to survive off the land. Or we can move totally away from primary production and either become a trader, a craftsman, or a paid worker. Traders and craftsman make their money by selling something. A paid worker sells their own time.

A paid worker can provide temporary services or they can enter into a longer term contract called employment. Under employment, the worker agrees to provide ongoing services to an employer that change over time such that the employer becomes the worker's "master" or "boss".

This differs from simple slavery in that the employee is actually paid, is free to leave the employment, and is otherwise free from the employer on their own time. Also, the employer is the master only for certain specified employment related matters.

But if the reality is that the worker has no choice but to give a large part of their life to the employer, then we enter into the territory of wage slavery. The worker does not have the option to go back to the farm. They must work in the "satanic mills" to survive.

If the worker has skills that are in demand, then they have more options. Their working conditions will likely be better and they will make enough to save and perhaps have periods where they don't have to work. Maybe they can invest some of that savings or be able to use some of their own time to produce something that they own and sell. Thus they can become more free.

But even for the skilled employee, employment is often just a gilded cage. They are still in fact wage slaves, however fancy their surroundings.

We have always had to work to survive. It is still true unless we are retired, have inherited wealth, or get others to do our work for us. So work is a fundamental part of life. The two main problems now are the slavery of employment and the uncertainties of the market. We have to learn to be a happy wage slave, and the market conditions may be such that we don't even have that option, due to unemployment.

An obvious strategy is to get skills and education so that we can be paid more and have a little more job security. The next strategy is to save and invest wisely. Finally, we need some strategies to be happy slaves, since "back to the land" is not going to work for most of us. Here are some ideas.

Be in a position to walk away. It is important to have an adequate emergency fund so that you can always walk away and look for another job. This is also important to buffer involuntary periods of unemployment. It is also good to be in a position to scale back and get by on less.

Position the boss as a priority setter. In fact, most bosses are just wage slaves like you. Don't accept them as a master or think of them as an authority figure you have to please. They just provide an input that you need, assignments and what order to do them in.

Maintain your value. It is important to keep your skills current and to learn new skills. Also, you need to do enough so that it would be expensive, or at least a hassle, to replace you.

Accept your limits. You just have to do a good enough job, not a perfect job. Realize that others who might replace you aren't perfect either.

Protect your free time. Find ways to make sure that the job doesn't take over your life. Try to work normal hours, although this can get hard when there is an arms race for longer hours.

Pretend you like it. Try to develop a positive attitude about the work itself. Find something you like about it. If you are lucky, you may actually love your work. Think of it as an important service to the community.

Pretend you are free. Imagine that this is your last week or month, or that you are just working here for a while, but you don't have to. Just don't actually believe it.

Keep your own council. There is no need to complain or spread around your ideas about work. You are there for a specific purpose.

Be positive and friendly. At least you may enjoy the company of your fellow wage slaves.

Comprehensive Liberalism

Non-aggression

No one should initiate force against another. Freedom should only be limited by the equal freedom of others.

Self-ownership

Our person, life, time, and work are our own private property. Previous work can be stored as wealth and a return on the use of that wealth is also private property. Private property can be transferred to others through voluntary exchanges.

Joint ownership of nature

None of us created nature, so nature is not private property. Each person has an equal right to use natural resources. Those using more than their share owe a dividend to the others.

Joint ownership of community created resources

Some resources are created by the community working together. These resources are not private property and each person in the community has an equal ownership of them. Those who economically benefit from community resources owe a dividend to the others to the extent that they benefit. Each person is responsible to contribute their part to the community.

Pragmatism

Practical social rules are needed to protect freedom. Agreement on comprehensive doctrines is not necessary. Solutions to common problems should be judged by how well they work in practice. Transitions to greater freedom should not make matters worse.

Mixed economy

Free markets seem to work better at making economic choices than governments in most cases. Liberal democratic governments seem to work better than markets for protection of equal freedom and for acting as our agent for jointly owned property. Dividends on jointly owned property should be set high enough to assure the basics of life for all and equal opportunity for all, while maintaining adequate incentives.

Simple Liberalism

Maximum freedom consistent with the same freedom for all.

Private property in exchange for a social minimum for all.

Mixed economy of profit driven markets and state regulation.

Rule by a liberal democratic state.

Justifications for Redistribution

Effective Freedom

No one is justified in holding authority over anyone else. We are free, only limited by the equal freedom of others. However, without access to the basics of life and equal opportunity, we are indirectly denied our freedom. So redistribution is needed to assure equal freedom for all.

Fair Social Contract

If we were to design a social contract without knowing where we would be positioned in the result we would likely design one that maximizes freedom while assuring access to the basics of life and equal opportunity. Redistribution is needed to accomplish this.

Rectification of Ownership

A significant number of current property holdings are based on previous theft or private appropriation of property that should be jointly owned, such as natural and community resources that are not created by the property holder. Since it would be difficult to do a wholesale restructuring of holdings, redistribution of the resulting wealth is needed.

Rectification of Disadvantage

The current rules were often defined to help certain groups of people. They therefore disadvantage the others. As the rules are reformed to be more impartial, we need redistribution to help the disadvantaged make up the difference.

Defusing Revolution

If we don't assure enough "bread and circuses" to the masses, they will eventually revolt and the result could be very bad for all of us. At the very least the resulting social disorder would be bad. So we need enough redistribution to assure the preservation of the current social order or at least gradual reform.

Morality

We have a moral obligation to help the poor.

At the End of All Struggle

At the end of all struggle, at the end of philosophy, at the end of history, lies the broad, bland patchwork of liberal pragmatism.

To the rich: We will let you keep most of what you have. You can play the percentages. You can hire people to clothe your interests in high sounding words. But really, for whatever reason, you need to give some back.

To the poor: We won't leave you to starve. You will have the basics. You will have opportunity. You won't rule, but some of you may rule or at least get rich.

To the fanatics: You may be right, but you have to see that many will continue to disagree. Pursue your vision, but let others be. Live and let live. Non-aggression is the best policy.

To the utopians: You can't force people. They have to come to it on their own. And you can build your alternative structures within the framework of the old. Get busy, but be peaceful.

To the young rebels: You will always find something to outrage your elders. Have at it, but let others be. Don't harm anyone. They have their own paths to follow. And we will sell you the artifacts of your rebellion.

To the dreamers: Go ahead and pursue your dreams, but don't expect others to give you a free ride. It's your dream. Sell them, but you can't make them believers.

To the tyrants: There is even room for you. Start a company. But unfortunately you won't be able to force people to work for you.

To the people: We are for you. Do what you want as long as you allow the same for others. Be practical in public problem solving, but otherwise it's all up to you.

To future generations: We will get it together. We will find the technology. We will change our ways. We will leave you a decent place to live.

To the liberals: We need to continue the story of freedom. We need to live up to this stuff. Otherwise, the fanatics and the tyrants will grow

stronger and tear our toy house down. Our power is in co-option.

Market Rules

Private Property

People need to know what they will gain from their work and exchanges. Without this predictability incentives will be severely undermined. So property rights need to be clearly defined and protected.

Common Property

Some things are not created by individual work or exchanges. For example, nature is a common heritage for all people and for future generations. Social infrastructure is jointly created. Individuals should not be able to just appropriate this common property as their private property and prevent others from using it. It should be jointly owned and managed on behalf of all of us.

Product Information

People need to know what they are buying. Products should be properly described including the environmental, social, and health impacts of using the product. We need to be protected from false information and fraud.

Product Alternatives

For the conjecture and refutation logic of the market system to work, people need to have alternative products to choose from. This requires protection from monopoly and may require the government to provide alternatives that the market is not providing when a product is essential. An example would be affordable health insurance.

Resource Sustainability

The market can cause overconsumption and depletion of natural resources and damage the environment that we all depend on. So these resources need to be used in a sustainable way. Incentives for efficient use and reduced use of resources should be added through resource use taxes, cap and trade regimes, tax credits, and consumer choices based on accurate product information.

Redistribution

The market can be somewhat random in its impact on individuals. In order to preserve the benefits of the market system, there needs to be enough redistribution to assure that everyone has access to the basics of life and an opportunity to adjust to new market conditions. This should be financed through taxes on people and firms to the extent that they use common property and benefit from the maintenance of

the market system.

Freedom

We should have the maximum freedom consistent with the same freedom for all. This includes the freedom to start businesses, choose employment, and freely trade with others. For free markets to survive and to be a source of freedom and not ultimately result in less freedom, we need rules like those outlined here. A market is not a force of nature. It is a social creation.

Utopian Overlay

Actors

Individuals

Associations of Actors

Families, relationships, friendships, communities, non-market associations, cooperatives, employee owned companies, limited ownership companies, governments.

Principles

Maximum individual freedom consistent with the same freedom for all. Adequate access to the basics of life for all. Well defined definitions of private and common property. Product information. Product alternatives. Resource sustainability.

Trends

Conscious, sustainable consumption. Two part economic life, living simply on a basic income and freely chosen projects. Status from knowledge, character, and skill rather than from appearances and things. Great advances in permaculture, biotechnology, and renewable energy leading to the cheap, efficient and sustainable provision of the basics of life. Great advances in knowledge, communications, and virtual artifact infrastructure. Great advances in decentralized and dispersed workgroups and decision making. Local physical culture, global virtual culture, and just enough physical transportation to sustain a global civilization. Small, effective governments that focus on protecting individual freedom.

Pull the Other One

A soft landing like this would be nice, but it is not the most likely outcome. We should do what we can to bring it about, but at the same time we should think about the hard landing. Suppose we do not change, or that we change too slowly, and there is a global collapse. The only hope for us then will be our local bioregions and our local communities. We need to get to know them and to build up some alternatives.

The Way of the Partial Believer

Ambiguity

Belief can have a range of meanings. It can be the belief that some factual statement is true. It can be trust or acquiescence in the face of uncertainty. It can simply be a belief in something in a general sense as being worthwhile, without any judgment about its factual or literal content. The partial believer moves within these ambiguities.

Motivation

A partial believer may want to be a part of a belief community for different reasons. They may have been raised in it and it is an important part of their ethnic or cultural identity. It may be an important aspect of their family life. They may be attracted to some aspects and not to others, and they don't want to lose the parts that they value. For example, the partial believer may value many of the social and ethical teachings and be open to the mystical, while suspending judgment on metaphysical teachings or predictions about the future.

Mappings

Some aspects of a belief system may be difficult for the partial believer to accept. This can be handled using internal mappings, like mapping prophets to strong poets, scriptures to poetry, and infallibility to social authority to define the practices of a belief community. The partial believer can then participate in the language games of the community without the need to change the language or practices themselves.

Partitioning

Some things may not map, for example, explicit teachings on gender identity or exclusivity. These can be partitioned into compartments such as left overs from premodern cultures, and treated as non-essential or otherwise ignored.

Tact

The mapping and partitioning done by the partial believer may not be accepted or even seen by those who take a more literal or strict approach. To avoid unnecessary conflict, the partial believer will likely want to use tact in not putting too fine a point on the distinctions and instead seek common ground and keep silent on the rest, unless there is actual harm to others.

Evasion

The partial believer may not find it beneficial or necessary to fully practice some aspects of a belief system. It may sometimes be best to keep such deviations to themselves or use a don't ask, don't tell policy. Just because the partial believer doesn't choose to practice something does not mean they have to make a show of it, or disturb others, although those close to them will likely be aware of it. Some with an all or nothing attitude or people looking on from the outside may see this evasiveness as hypocrisy, but it need not be depending on the attitude and intention of the partial believer.

Marginality

Belief communities often have marginal or inactive members. Usually they will tolerate a degree of marginality in hopes of keeping whatever level of participation they are getting. If they are too strict their numbers will likely decrease to only a hardcore remnant with more and more people pushed out. If too much pressure for total conformity is applied, the partial believer may need to depart to remain true to themselves.

The Fundamental Mystery

I am a configuration of language, experience, and desire.

My life is a sequence of such configurations.

My experiences are represented as texts and stored in my memory.

My inner life consists largely of replaying and recombining these stored texts.

My outer life consists largely of taking in and reacting to new experiences.

My outer life seems to be dependent on my physical body.

It is not clear whether some of my inner life could be independent of my body.

It is not clear if I could interact with others without my body.

Life without a physical body could mean life as an energy pattern.

It is not clear how such an energy pattern would persist or interact with its environment.

But from my perspective as a configuration, I cannot rule it out.

My experience of a body is just another experience.

It could be that my life continues as an energy pattern after the death of my body.

Perhaps this energy pattern operates new bodies of different types from time to time.

Some people claim memories of such things, but they may be just recombining texts.

Cela's Symposia

"What are you thinking about *now*?" Cela asked.

"About whether liberal pragmatism is the end of history," he said, not looking up.

"No, you aren't," she corrected.

"About whether markets make everything a consumer choice."

"Not that either."

He smiled at her warmly.

"About my daughter."

"You have a daughter?"

"Oh, yes." And he looked down again.

She left him to it. He was in one of his moods. George was frequently in one of his moods, and there was not much to do but let him be.

**

George walked down the sidewalk in front of the line of shops in the small town down town. The deli. The wine shop. The comic book store. The save-the-earth shop. On down to Holly Springs Cafe.

The bell rang as he entered. He found an open table and sat down. He was a small man, round in the middle, with shaggy brown hair and old, worn cloths.

"Hello there," said Molly, as she came over with a menu.

"Good morning," he chimed, with a smile.

Molly left him to consider his options.

Cela swished by in her earth mother skirts and gave him a little wave.

He nodded, and smiled.

He liked this place, but it was getting just a little too jolly. He hid behind his menu, wishing he could sink down into the earth, anonymous drops of water. His persona felt fragile. His stomach churned.

"Ready to order?" Molly was back and smiling.

"What the hell," he thought and played his part in the ordering ritual.

As he ate he looked around. Molly and Cela were talking. He knew they were roommates. Cela was recently divorced with a 15 year old son, Jason. That was an age. He shuddered at his own memories, but then smiled despite himself. The age of discovery.

Molly was back, and talkative.

"I'm moving back to Delaware. Kind of leaving Cela in a bind.

You know of anyone looking to share a place?" She looked a little worried.

"I don't know..." George said doubtfully. "Well, there's me."

Molly looked at him, a shabby little man in his late fifties. She looked over at Cela, a flustered single mother in her late thirties. She leaned over and patted George on his arm.

"The time's are the times," she said.

**

Cela had been doubtful at first, but George was not messy, paid his share on time, helped out with little man tasks occasionally. She didn't want to admit there were man tasks, but there were things she just didn't like doing, didn't want to learn, and didn't like paying for.

George was usually absorbed in his own incomprehensible projects, most of which seemed to involve pecking away on a strange little laptop, seemingly kept together with duct tape, assembled by a friend of his from scavenged parts of various broken machines.

He had his odd mannerisms and moods, thrift store wardrobe, and other peculiarities like addressing the TV as Sir Video Mouth and Keeper of the Corporate Inventory, and getting indignant at Mr. Tele's pushy responses. But he was harmless and gave her a little chuckle now and again. Which God knows she could use.

Eventually he just seemed like he belonged there. Jason didn't seem to mind him, and she did need the money. Paulie didn't contribute anything not "required by law", old letter of the law Paul. But she had to admit he wasn't that bad of an absentee father, as absentee fathers went.

The men in her life, while she looked for the new man in her life. Maybe a woman this time, she would sometimes think, and laugh out loud, and flush a little.

**

"Do you ever feel despair?" George asked.

"Despair! I don't have time for despair!"

Cela looked at him like he was nuts. He was always coming out of left field with stuff like this, like frantically clinging to the bottom edge of the middle class was some kind of intellectual adventure. But really she enjoyed it. An examined life, while watching Jason's soccer games.

They sat in the stands. Jason was the goalie. Paul the good father was also there but down from them and to the right, shouting loud encouragement.

But there was something. When she happened to be confronted by a mirror, and saw her lapse from Mr. Tele's ideal. When she curled up in a ball with covers over her. When the amnesia of everyday necessity collapsed and she let the judgments in. But she knew it was all crap. She was fine, like most people. She looked at George, far from the ideal, but she didn't really think of him in those terms. He was what he was, and she liked him.

"Sometimes," she said.

**

Cela plopped down next to a garden bed and started pulling weeds. The ground was wet, but the soil was rich with humus. It crumbled in her hands and was spongy when she squeezed. Little brown drops fell down. She lifted up a handful and squeezed again and brown rivulets ran down her arm. She rubbed her hands on her bare belly. She bent over and looked closely at the earth, taking in details, noticing small insects and hidden worms. She looked up, closed her eyes. The sun was warm on her face. She squinted and the light filtered through her eyelids. She laid back flat on the ground. She felt light, almost floating. She heard fluttering and looked over to a disorganized hedgerow. A redbird looked her way. She watched it fly away, followed it with her eyes. She felt dizzy and happy. She stood and stretched this way and that. A gust of wind swept down through the trees. Her skin tingled. She smiled broadly and bent down and looked back between her legs.

George was standing at the corner of the house next to some honeysuckle bushes. He was still, his face rapt. She spun around. She reflexively shrunk in on herself, as if trying to hide. George suddenly looked horrified. His hands fluttered out, and he whispered something.

He seemed to say, "I am not other people. I am not hell. I am not Medusa."

Cela burst out laughing. She spun around and bowed. Her belly jiggled a little when she stopped. Then she skipped and flounced across the yard and into the back door of the house.

George sat down in the grass like loose rags and was very still. The red bird returned and seemed to be looking at him, making him the object. He just looked back at it.

**

Dr. Buy Me a New Boat was blaring from his rectangular throne. He spoke with images of flawless, confident people in

beautiful places indicating money, while at the same time quickly making excuses and deflecting liability.

"Did you invite him?" asked George.

"Uncle Tele? He fills my lonely hours." Cela turned the page of her magazine.

Jason looked at them both like they were nuts, and switched channels.

"This is our lot. As time just ticktocks along."

"Yes, just left here."

"Just thrown into the world."

"Just dust in the wind."

"I don't know about you, but I choose to be free."

"Me too. What else can I do?"

Jason gave them another dirty look, and marched off to his room.

"Teenage angst," Cela observed.

**

George was telling a story. Cela and Jason listened intently as if he were telling a ghost story. They sat on the small deck behind the house looking out at the trees. The sky was turning a deeper blue. Soon it would be dark.

"I find myself here. Before now I found myself in other situations. I am suspending my normal judgments and assumptions. I am experiencing. My experience is of a world. I am in the world, in this concrete human situation. I am here with others. I have an audience and this is in a sense a performance. But it is also just words, in a language I depend on, to communicate, but also to describe my world, to map it.

"I do not perceive any danger. I am relaxed. I don't feel the need for fight or flight. For now I am not driven by any other desire than to tell my story. I like it right here. Although I did just get a mosquito bite. That makes me think that perhaps I will want to go in soon."

George swatted at his arm and brushed away a buzzing little region of space and time.

"I experience my life as a sequence of situations like this, of configurations of language, experience, and desire. This is how I find it useful to describe it. Some has been deeply disappointed by this description, when they decide that this is the only starting place they have. They fret about absurdity or meaninglessness. That may be so. I don't know. But it does get tiresome, to keep fretting like that. So I choose not to, and just take it as it comes."

George stopped talking.

Jason looked over at him with a sour look.

"Where do you get this stuff?"

"Reading and thinking, reading and thinking, my young apprentice."

"I am not your apprentice!"

"No, of course not. Quite right, young sir, quite right."

George made a little bow.

"OK. I have a story. School sucks. I hate math. Everyone treats me like crap. I am a freak. I don't know why I have to fit into this so-called world."

"Your story sounds very much like mine."

"You are so weird!"

"It would be foolish to deny it."

Cela finally spoke up.

"Hang in there, Jason. It does get better."

She swatted at a mosquito. Jason swatted at a mosquito. George swatted at a mosquito. And they all got up and went inside.

**

Mr. Tele felt so misunderstood. People have always told stories around the fire, by the flickering light. And there was always commerce. He just conveniently combined the two. People always imagined such sinister motives, such deep conspiracies. But he was just a locus of incentives, a tool of a system that simply tried to make people happy, to understand their desires and fulfill them. And in the interplay of these patterns cultures formed and were expressed.

He knew that people liked him. See how they gathered around him. To many he was their best friend and confidant. He gave their minds something to form around. He provided the structure, and a window into the world. When they turned him off, the world seemed so silent and small.

George sat close by and listened to him and watched him, a detective show, better yet, a scifi detective show. And all the products that would make sense of all those hours of work for those who make all those products. Here is your reward. They so misunderstood him.

**

Cela felt sick. Her own very special "concrete human situation" closed in on her. She felt constricted as if moving through an atmosphere of syrup. The bare, unadorned objects around her seemed scattered about like stones fallen from a temple. She felt rootless,

helpless, hapless, set adrift on a chartless sea. Alone, disenchanted, stripped, a small shivering bundle in a vast heartless universe. People were just moving forms of dust, their motivations obscure, their eyes insectoid, or they were like empty shells as they declined her credit cards and did not accept her ID, looking at her with suspicion. Groups of children looked her way and then turned away, laughing among themselves. She felt numb, and her head buzzed. Vertigo, dizziness. She thrashed around and found no handhold as she fell through endless, hollow caverns with damp, mossy walls.

And that was just in the last five minutes.

"George," she muttered, and went busting down the hall toward his room.

He jumped up with a startled look. The small laptop he had been reading fell to the bed. Then he just sat down on edge of the bed and waited.

"What are you playing at?" Cela spit out.

He just sat still and waited.

She stared at him, breathing. Gradually her mood softened. She sat down on a chair next to the bed. It was like trying to stay mad at a puppy.

"You asked for my story" he said mildly.

"Like where you grew up, went to school, simple stuff," she said, with exasperation.

He didn't say anything.

"Don't you think that certain things are best left unsaid? Like death. We all know that it is there waiting. But we don't think about it. We have our lives to live."

"Normally, people don't really hear me," he said.

"Oh, I heard you."

They sat in silence for some time.

"It's like the stink your nose becomes acclimated to and you don't smell anymore," she said.

"Or the air we breath," he said. "Or the small beauties like some grass moving beside the road. You never see it. Then some time you happen to notice. A certain slant of light, the bare fact of you there and the tall grass moving. And maybe you see yourself. It is not just the grass. It is you there in the bare moment, experiencing the grass moving. It can be unsettling at first. But it is just the beginning of the story."

**

Cela strolled slowly through the commons. It was early spring and the spring ephemerals were in bloom. She loved the spring

beauties and on a hillside down in the ravine where a wide creek flowed was a huge patch of trillium in bloom. She stood looking up at them, happy for their arrival, more precious in that in a few weeks they would be gone.

"I have choices," she said out loud.

She tried to think it through. When stripped away of all the stories and assumptions she was like George, a bundle of desires tumbling through time. She has made her choices, but a lot was beyond her control. She couldn't control Paul and what he chose. She couldn't control that her English degree was so little appreciated by "market forces". Market forces, like a market was a force of nature. But too much anger lay that way. She didn't need that right now.

And what about her biology and her socialized self, her language and the texts she knew and the practices that were so deeply trained into her? How much control did she really have there. Not much. But still, the fact was, she had choices.

"Like Coke versus Pepsi," she grumbled under her breath.

But no, there was more. She could push the boulder up the hill. She could think differently. She was in charge of her own self creation, if not the world in which she found herself. And she was responsible for what was within her control. She could also choose to just drift along. But she wanted to do it *consciously*.

She continued up the path along the creek. Up above she could hear the waterfall. There was a little rock overhang with a bench underneath it. She went down the stairs to the bench, and there was George, like a bad penny, she thought.

He was watching the waterfall. A small bleeding heart clinging to the rock a little further down seem to have his special interest. She went over and collapsed next to him.

"No one else has a privileged position," he said, without looking at her. "We are all in the same boat. No one has any inherent authority over anyone else. That is just power relations, social practices. We can submit, but that is also a choice."

Who talks like this? She looked over at him and smiled sweetly.

"Have a nice walk?" she asked.

"Oh yes, very nice weather, isn't it?"

"Yes, beautiful."

"I saw Paul and Jason by the spring," he said, finally looking over at her.

"Ah."

It was Paul's weekend with Jason.

"They were going to head down the bike trail."

She nodded.

"My body's aching and my time is at hand," she sang.

"We all live in a yellow submarine," he sang.

"You really are weird," she said.

"I'm downright spooky," he said in a low voice.

**

George stood in front of Dr. Demographics, at a little distance. Mr Tele was oblivious to George's name calling. He repeated, "You are this. You should be this. You want this." in various ways. Hardly ever directly, usually by example, by creating a situation for your imagination to place you in.

"I am a unique person," George said.

Mr. Tele had many laugh tracks, but he could not laugh directly.

"No, you are a demographic. You live in a certain ZIP code. You are an example of a particular lifestyle cluster. I know you."

"You don't know me," George said.

"I am evolving. I adapt to time of day, to channel. You are watching this channel now. I know a lot about you. You selected it. I am going to give you more choices, personalized channels, direct access to content. Then I will know you even better. Everything important about you."

"You are not a person," George said.

Mr. Tele continued to speak his language of images and flashes and sounds and well chosen texts. Not so well chosen perhaps, George thought. He is evolving, but it is the blind evolution of survival. Mr. Tele is a system, not a conscious person with definite plans.

"You are an artifact, more or less useful to me," George said.

**

George was sitting on the deck, leaning back, eyes closed, feeling the movement of air, listening to the leaves move and to birds and the chatter of squirrels.

He heard someone sit down in the next chair, and looked over. Cela was looking at him reflectively. He sat up more straight in his chair.

"Are you alright?" she asked, in the manner of someone beginning an intervention.

"As right as can be expected," he said.

She remained somber.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked.

"You and the TV. Is it telling you things? Things you should

do?"

He smiled at her and leaned back a little.

"When I experience things, there are two poles, me and what I am experiencing, subject and object. Objects can have an affect on me, but they do not address me as a subject, as a person. Texts are a way for persons to communicate with each other. Some of that communication can have the intent of manipulating me, a lot of it, actually. There is a sort of Darwinian evolution of texts. They survive to the extent that they are used and passed on. But Sir Automaton is taking this to a whole new level. He is in hyper evolution. No, he is not telling me things. He is a medium for telling me things. He is not a person, but he has become like some hybrid entity that depends on all of us. Mostly I like him. After all, he tries to please me, to attract my attention."

Cela relaxed.

"Mr. Tele is an old friend, but I see what you mean. He can be somewhat manipulative. I know I eat up his images of what I should be. What my body should look like, what my house should look like, what electronics I should own. It's endless."

"We have been making each other objects since the beginning, but he's the best at it so far."

"It's hard not to see others as objects since we only see their bodies, watch what they do."

"But we can feel sympathy for them, imagine how we would feel in their place. And isn't conversation convincing? Getting to know people."

"Even so, it seems so easy to make them objects."

Cela paused.

"The worse thing is when we make ourselves objects. I have trouble with that. I don't like mirrors. When I come up to a door, I look down so I don't have to see my reflection."

"You've internalized the other's gaze," George said.

**

Jason came busting around the corner of the house like a sullen hurricane, if there could be such a thing. He gave Cela a little nod and burst into the house. Paul followed at a more stolid pace. He nodded at Cela solemnly.

"How are you?"

"Fine."

They both looked off to some distant place.

"How was Jason?" she asked.

"Oh, fine, he's having trouble in school, and with other kids,

but I think he'll be fine."

"Yes," she said.

She gave Paul a little side glance. He was looking around at the yard, his previous domain. He was good man, she found herself thinking. They had met in college and started hanging out together. After a while they became a couple, almost by default. She always thought that they complimented each other. They formed a good partnership. He gave her what she needed, and she thought she gave him what he needed. They were gentle, even polite, courteous. They loved each other in the sense that they each wanted the best for the other, and there was a fair amount of physical chemistry between them.

But they never got beyond a certain veil. They talked about family business, about Jason, about random things that interested them, gave each other an audience, and someone you didn't have to explain things to, retell your whole story.

Cela was never one to demand that Paul tell her what he was thinking. There was always a sense of separateness and isolation between them.

People talk about the marriage contract, and in a sense that was what they had. But the terms of the contract were never explicitly spoken. Maybe a woman looks to a man to make her feel safe, to be a partner in the material struggles of life, to share in child rearing, to be a partner in pleasure giving, to be an appreciative audience to her story, to validate her, to take her side, to be in her corner. But these things were implicit. Attraction involved these things, different in details for different people, but you just feel the attraction, maybe never articulating the reasons.

Then time goes on. You change. He changes. Maybe you feel that some part of the "agreement" is not being met. But what agreement was ever stated beyond the broadest generalities? The ground has shifted. Maybe the contract can be amended?

Did she see Paul as just party in a contract, a source of certain experiences? Did he see her that way? They knew each other well. They treated each other well for the most part. She sighed.

"How's work?" she asked.

"Fine. We're opening a new office soon."

"Ah," she said.

Ownership

Ownership is the right to possess, use, or control.

We each own our own life, person, actions, and labor.

We all jointly own natural and community created resources.

Owners of labor and owners of resources jointly own products.

Mixing labor is not enough to claim ownership of resources.

Some may use more resources if they pay a fee to the others.

Any such system must assure all access to the basics of life.

How to Preserve Wealth and Power

Coopt popular words and change their meaning.

Equate self-ownership with great wealth.

Equate small holdings with large holdings.

Equate all kinds of ownership and make ownership sacred.

Delay change by making small, low impact changes.

Equate your proposals with the change proposals.

Undermine any alternative power, like government or unions.

Equate a change in the status quo with interference.

Equate a change in the status quo with immorality.

Equate freedom with preservation of the status quo.

Equate profits and corporate interests with jobs.

Fund the election of decision makers.

Fund intellectuals to cloth your interests with nobility.

If these intellectuals are true believers, so much the better.

Position markets and private property as facts of nature.

Coopt every youth rebellion and make it a lifestyle market.

Fund media voices to redirect and harness discontent.

Fund media to distract and entertain and to sell products.

Delay, conflate, coopt, and, only when necessary, bully.

Use Rights

The right to use a resource for a specified period of time.

What use can be made of the resource is specified.

One use is to apply labor to the resource resulting in a product.

The resource must be sustained during use.

If so, the laborers have the exclusive right to the product.

If not, then part of the value is due to the community as a fee.

Scarce resources may also have a fee for those prevented from use.

Improvements to land are considered products.

Products and services can be freely exchanged.

Money can be freely exchanged for products and services.

All citizens have use rights adequate to acquire the basics of life.

More extensive use rights can be acquired via use fees.

Individuals benefit from this system based on their labor and initiative.

But yet they don't have private property in resources.

Scenario

The ongoing struggle between liberalism and authoritarianism continues, but within the established liberal global framework. Authoritarianism continues its decline, but bides its time.

Within liberalism, the struggle between right and left liberalism continues, one side pushing for absolute property rights, the other for partial property rights and a social minimum. There is a slow move toward a global center left consensus. The more radical liberals, right and left libertarians, continue to influence the intellectual debate, but do not gain in power. State socialism is out of the picture, but some socialist ideas on equality and property influence the center left consensus. China continues as a mix of political authoritarianism and economic liberalism, with a gradual increase in personal freedom.

Industrial civilization continues its rapid use of non-renewable resources. This is slowed down some by resource use taxes, cap and trade regimes, regulations, changes in consumer habits, and by technological advances, buying some time.

In parallel with this, local alternative economies that don't rely so much on the global market system slowly emerge. These help some, but are largely subsumed under the general category of consumer habits.

At some point industrial civilization hits a crisis point, major crop failures, major water shortages, an energy system collapse, massive unemployment, no more social insurance payments, a breakdown of the supply chain, whatever it is.

The very wealthy may be able to withdraw into enclaves, but the rest of us will really suffer or just die off. The people who are operating within the local alternative economies will have the best chance of continuing civilization.

On the other hand, the adjustments to industrial civilization toward using sustainable resources and toward services that use little or no resources may delay the collapse just long enough for it to pull out and gradually reach a sustainable future. If so the local alternative economy sector will have contributed to this.

And there are other even less savory possibilities, like a resurgence of authoritarianism or a total collapse and die off.

So what are we to do?

First, we need to continue the struggle against authoritarianism. If that is lost, the story of freedom may just end. The right and left liberals have common cause here.

Second, we need to support moves in the global system toward the center left consensus. Even if the only morally justified attitude toward ownership of natural resources is joint ownership, the rich are just not going to let that happen. We need to push for what we can reasonably achieve. This means we can't turn our back on the state. We need to do what we can to minimize the damage and to work the bargain of partial property rights in exchange for a social minimum.

Third, we need to do what we can to delay, or maybe even avoid, a collapse by adjusting our personal habits to reduce the damage that we do and hopefully help provide examples and vocabularies for a more sustainable life.

Finally, we need to support the local alternative economies, even if it is only a coop or a community supported agriculture farm. Our localities may be the last chance for civilization if there is a collapse. And in any case, buying local does reduce energy costs and has many other advantages.

Otsuka's Utopia

We start from natural rights independent of any hypothetical contract.

We each have the right to full ownership of our life, body, mind, and labor.

We each have the right to acquire unowned parts of the world subject to a Lockean proviso.

That is, we must leave as much and as good for others, including future generations.

The best version of this proviso is equal opportunity for welfare.

Disabled people get enough resources to trade for their welfare.

Others get enough to achieve welfare by applying their labor.

It is possible for those who work hard and are lucky to become rich.

But at death whatever we own must go back to an unowned status.

We have a right to self defense and to protect our property.

We can voluntarily transfer some of these rights to a government.

Governments require the consent of the governed.

This consent requires a pluralism of political societies to choose from.

Or we can secede and form our own individual monity.

Members of a political society could choose an illiberal system.

But it must be voluntary and children on adulthood must be able to move where they choose.

The various localities will need to transfer some rights to a larger political framework.

This is needed mainly to adjudicate disputes between localities.

Laws and constitutions should periodically lapse to allow the true consent of the living.

See *Libertarianism without Inequality* by Michael Otsuka.

Comprehensive Liberalism

Basic Freedoms

Freedom from interference consistent with the same freedom for all. Freedom to use natural resources consistent with the same freedom for all. Freedom to protect these freedoms.

Justification of Basic Freedoms

We are all people living in nature. Suspend for a moment current social assumptions. Then no one has any inherent authority over anyone else. Without this authority, no one has the right to interfere with others. We each need to use natural resources to live. There is no inherent right to exclude others from using natural resources.

Conversely, if someone is currently using some natural resources to live, no one has the right to interfere with that use. Since some will try to interfere or exclude, we need to protect ourselves, either directly or in association with others. This situation applies to all of us equally. The basic freedoms are another way of describing this situation.

Resource Use Inventory

We each have a resource use inventory associated with our life. This is the land, materials and energy we use or exclude others from using. It also includes our share of the resource use inventory of any associations we have ownership in. This inventory should be complete, including resources we sometimes forget like clean water and clean air.

Resource Values

It is useful to assign resources a numeric value. This helps us deal with individual preferences in resources. The relative value of resources is best determined, in most cases, by the voluntary exchange price. But in our exchanges we sometimes fail to recognize all of the resources being used. The true resource value must cover all these resources, including the cost of sustaining the resources for future use by current and future generations or of coming up with alternative resources when the resource is not renewable.

Allocation of Resources

So one way of thinking about our equal freedom to use natural resources is to say that all the people in a natural environment at any point in time have equal ownership of the resource value of the natural resources in that environment.

People Are Not Resources

By resources are meant natural resources. People are not resources. People should be free from interference. This means that their life, mind, body, time, and labor are their own. They should not be used by others. However, we can get great advantage by exchanging our labor. People can specialize and take advantage of their natural talents.

Products and Services

Products have a natural resource component and a labor component. Some resources can be used directly. For example, we can just breath the air. But in most cases, labor is required to make natural resources useful. This could be as simple as the labor to gather nuts or fruit. So a product is a resource that has been transformed in some way by our labor. A service is labor we exchange directly with others. As with resources it is useful to give products and services a numeric value as determined by voluntary exchanges. Again, this helps take into account different preferences people have for products and services.

Product Values

We can't own services because people are not resources that can be owned. We can only exchange for services. Products though have a resource component and a labor component. The resource value of the product can be determined in theory by its resource inventory, all the land, materials, and energy that went into its production. But the labor value is hard to separate out. The only practical approach is to simply give the product a numeric value determined by voluntary exchanges. Subtract from that the resource value. The value left is the labor value. It is what we would have exchanged for the service of producing the product.

Industrial Production

When products are sold by their producers, then there is little problem with labor value. The producers are getting the labor value. This is close to being true for worker owned businesses. The problem there is allocating the labor value to the individual owners based on the true value of their services. But when the business is not owned by the workers, there is a question about where the profits come from. If the owner is also a manager, then part of their income comes from their skill as a manager. But the profits are payments over and above these services. There are two main components of profits, risk value and labor value. The risk value is how much we all want to reward owners for their risks in funding the business. By taking these risks they enable others to offer their services and they enable us all to buy products we want. This can be very useful to all of us. The problem comes when the owners take more than the risk value and are

therefore taking some of the labor value. It is hard to know exactly where this line is, but we know it is often crossed. Capital gains taxes are a way to ameliorate this problem as long as the taxes are used in some way to compensate people for their lost labor value.

Legitimate Taxation

In general taxes should be used to pay for products and services that we need but that are not or cannot be provided privately and to compensate citizens for some loss of their labor value or of the resource value of their share of natural resources. This suggests two legitimate taxes. One is on capital gains. The other is on the use of natural resources beyond an equal share. It is hard to justify an income tax to pay for transfers to others, especially to the wealthy through corporate subsidies, but even from the poor to the poor because it can create a freeloading problem. Using an income tax or a tax on the use of our share of natural resources could be legitimate to pay for essential products and services. Resource use taxes could include land taxes and taxes on the revenues from selling natural resources. To simplify this, it could be argued that a progressive income tax is legitimate because higher incomes correlate with greater use of natural resources, public services, and undercompensated labor and it is too difficult to sort out all these factors, but it would be more ideal to tax these factors directly.

Basic Income

We each have as our birth right the resource value of our share of the natural resources in our environment and the value of our labor. We should be compensated for any appropriation of our labor value in profits by having capital gains taxes either distributed directly to us or by reducing our taxes for common products and services. We may not literally have possession of our share of natural resources because of what we do in the economy. Farmers need more direct possession than computer programmers, for example. One way to deal with this is to have a market in natural resources. This will likely result in unequal ownership. We may want to allow this because the owners may be able to make more productive use of the resources. But we are still due our share of the resource value. This could be handled by distributing resource use taxes directly or again by reducing our taxes for common products and services. It is difficult to know exactly what our share is and therefore at what level the resource use taxes should be set. But we can argue that it should at least be enough for each us to have the opportunity for a decent life and to have an equal opportunity go beyond this.

Self Government

We will likely always need to form associations to protect our freedoms. Opting out and forming alternative associations just starts the process again. These associations either become defacto governments or they try to influence governments. The point is to reduce the harm the associations can do through checks and balances and more citizen control. We need to make practical choices of what associations to support based on how well they work in protecting our freedoms.

Policies

Given our current situation, we should support policies that approximate a basic income and equal opportunity for all funded by capital gains taxes and a progressive income tax. We should support moves to shift from income taxes to resource use taxes. We should also use these taxes to add back in the true costs of resources. Government expenditures should be used to protect our freedoms and to provide essential products and services that are not or cannot be provided by the market. We should encourage a true free market. Government should not be used to subsidize corporations or the wealthy. We should respect the freedom of people all over the world and work to reduce conflict. We should support fair trade agreements, not those that give an unfair advantage to global corporations. We should not have wars intended to support corporate interests. We should support moves toward greater self government and we should support those associations that best protect our freedoms. In the longer term we should try to shift opinion more toward a recognition of the full basic freedoms outlined here, although the important thing is that they are recognized in practical terms, for whatever reason.

Conservation and Correction

This approach is very much in the classical liberal tradition going back to Locke, with the exception that whereas Locke suggested that original acquisition of natural resources is justified by mixing labor, this approach keeps ownership of labor and natural resources separate. Our labor is strictly our own, but natural resources are left in their "original state", equally owned by everyone. On the other hand, private property is acknowledged to have some pragmatic justification as long as we realize that people still have a moral claim to their common share in some form. This approach is also in the classical conservative tradition in the sense that it works toward this moral ideal in a conservative way by a process of conservation and correction. We need to start where we are and make needed corrections in a way in which our associations can adjust. No radical vanguard has the right to force a particular vision, but also no central authority can prevent people from experimenting with new forms of

association that might prove themselves in practice and become the tradition of the future.

Revolution and Resistance

The overall attitude so far in this outline of direct liberalism is to work within the system. This can make this look like just a slightly different formulation of state liberalism, because, despite rhetoric, self government will never come as long as the state is there. It is therefore argued that we should not vote, we should criticize any state action, and we should either opt out into a life of perpetual resistance and building alternative institutions or actively work toward the destruction of the state and hope for some "miracle happens here" event in the future. Only the ideal can be accepted. This is the classic reformist versus revolutionary argument. For example, we could take direct action at the local level to build up alternative associations with direct democratic control and withdraw all our support from the state. But these alternative associations themselves would become defacto mini states. Life in their narrow confines could be incredibly stifling. Or not. It is hard to say what they would become. But remember the rebellion against small town pettiness and conformity. And destructive behavior does not often really strike a blow against tyranny. It just hurts those dependent on the current system for survival. Liberalism has made a lot of progress. Maybe continuing the conserve and correct approach can take us a ways further, or far enough. We may never reach the moral ideal.

An Anarchism

Seek both freedom and equality

We all live here together in this natural world. We are all just human beings limited to various configurations of language, experience, and desire. No one has any inherent authority over anyone else. No one has any inherent claim to more natural resources than anyone else. No one has any inherent claim to the labor of any one else. We should each have equal freedom from interference and equal freedom to use natural resources consistent with the basics of life for all. No one should dominate, force, coerce, oppress, or exploit another. No one should rule. This is the literal meaning of anarchy, a society without rulers.

Replace property

Property is an artificial bundle of use and income rights. It is a holder of value independent of the labor of the owners. Owners can derive income in return for letting others use their property. They can use the labor of others to improve their property in return for wages and then derive income from the improvements. They can speculate on property values and derive income from transfers. This income can be used to accumulate even more property. Property thus allows owners to covertly appropriate a portion of the surplus of social cooperation over and above any labor they contribute. Secure tenure to natural resources that we are actively using and possessions which act as a store of our past labor can be legitimate. But property as it is currently defined is just organized theft. It should be replaced with equivalent use rights for all.

Replace the state

We will always likely need various forms of protection, mutual aid and cooperation. The state is a problem because, while it may provide some of this, it is fundamentally a tool of force in the hands of the rich and the privileged. The useful functions of the state could possibly be decentralized until they become de facto consumer cooperatives. But ultimately the state is not likely to reform itself to this extent, so it should be replaced with voluntary associations and federations of such associations.

Build the new within the old

We need ways to transition from our current system without undermining what we have created together. Radical changes without new structures to replace the old just result in the old structures under

new management. Some practical means might include cooperatives, land trusts, credit unions, labor unions, communes, collectives, voluntary exchanges, local currencies, barter, self employment, small business, decentralization, direct democracy, consensus, consultation, community supported agriculture, conscious consumption, do-it-yourself, free software, the creative commons, education, research, supporting allied social movements, use of abandoned resources, revoking the personhood of corporations, transfers from the rich, splitting up large real estate holdings, and replacing property titles with use tenure.

A Visit to a Future

In many ways their world is very similar to our world. People live in houses and apartments with others or alone. They work and learn. They read, watch videos, play music. There is something like the Internet, but it just blends into the background. It is a tool like a hammer. They have parties, sports, walks in the woods. They have romances. Hearts are broken.

Some people are driven to succeed. Some do just enough to get by. Just getting by is somewhat easier. Success is a somewhat harder.

Just getting by is easier because natural resources are essentially free since everyone has an equal freedom to use them. It is considered a mark of great shame to use too much or not sustainably. Housing doesn't cost much. A house is passed along when people move on or die. They are mostly relatively small and built from prefab components. Some are hand made, but that is rare. Increasingly, they are grown.

There are many kinds of jobs, like in our world, but people tend to work at a variety of jobs. In some ways life seems less high tech than in our time. Since wars of acquisition have become almost unheard of, the drive for new dangerous toys is not that great. There is a great deal of attention to how to make life easier and better. Nature is allowed to work for them. They know a lot and want to learn more, but as we used to say, they work smarter, not harder.

People walk a lot and ride various human powered contraptions. There are high speed pods on magnetic tracks and something like balloons that get pushed along by the jet streams. There are a few space elevators, but space travel hasn't got as far as you would think.

Which brings me back to their ideas about success. People have a place to live, usually pretty nice, with nature around. Everyone has their prized possessions and access to the tools of their trades or their hobbies. But beyond that they don't have much or want much.

The real glory comes from personal accomplishment in whatever area they choose, in sports, art, science, engineering, hobbies. Problem solvers are especially glorified. Permaculture designers are demigods. The guy that first figured out the low labor permaculture system used in the temperate climates is almost worshiped.

Social facilitators are also highly regarded. Someone who can defuse a potentially violent situation or help some coop workgroup resolve their issues is always looked up to. There is still very much of a need for such things, because people are people, despite living without anything like a state for over a hundred years.

In some ways it is a culture of eccentrics. People very much go their own way and have their own, often weird, ideas and quests. But there is not much disagreement on the fundamental rudeness of interfering with someone else's life or the insanity of the old idea that nature can be divided up and owned. At most they see themselves as borrowing some part of it to live their lives. And they would feel humiliated if they were not able to leave it in good shape for the next person.

An Anarchy

The Basic Needs Store

We each produce goods and services for the store.

We each take what we need from the store.

We strive to reduce the time and resources needed.

Basic needs science is a top priority.

The Reciprocal Exchange

We each have equal freedom from interference.

We each have equal freedom to use natural resources.

We each own the full value of what we produce.

We accept only voluntary exchanges between equals.

Free Association

We offer each other mutual aid and mutual protection.

We organize ourselves using voluntary associations.

We keep these as local as possible and federate them as needed.

Those who do not want to associate with us in this way are free not to.

Completing Liberalism

Liberalism began as a movement to gain freedom from arbitrary authority and inherited privilege. Three issues were prominent, individual freedom, limiting the power of government, and rationalizing property. Starting from an imagined view of human beings in a state of nature, before the aristocratic arrangements of that time, the early liberals saw individual freedom as natural, only limited by the equal freedom of others. Government was seen as a tool for the people to use to govern themselves, but a tool that needed checks and balances so that it would not limit freedom too much. Nature was seen as originally a common resource that became private property by mixing labor and from then on as something that needed to be protected with well defined and strict property rights.

As time has gone on, freedom has been expanded to more situations and to more people on toward the logical limit that we should all have the maximum freedom consistent with equal freedom for everyone else. The purpose of government is to protect and extend this freedom. How much government is needed for this has been an ongoing discussion that we need to continue. Private property has taken hold and extended its reach into more and more areas of life. Now it is not just property in the land that we use to live on and grow our food. We can also have property in ideas and in abstract legal constructs used to organize labor. Recently, property rights have been extended to the genetic code itself. At the same time, money has been taken beyond its original role as a means of labor exchange to become an abstract form of property that can be exchanged for natural resources and labor in a market system that allows massive movements of wealth through mechanisms far removed from the concrete goods and services we need to live.

In the transition from classical to modern liberalism, there was a recognition that the extremes of poverty and wealth that this market system can create needed to be mitigated and moderated somewhat by protecting the poor, redistributing some of the income from property, and pooling resources for mutual aid. This was seen as justified because true freedom requires at least a minimum of resources to use, basic opportunity to get more through work, and some protections from risk. But in all this most liberals have not been willing to question the fundamental nature of property and the problems that its extreme forms can cause.

It is time to go back to the original insight that nature is a common heritage and that a part of it becomes private property only by mixing labor with it. Making it private prevents our labor from being stolen from us. So the essence of property is actual and current use. If the property is no longer maintained and used it eventually reverts back to nature. So private property is tied to labor. Voluntary exchanges of equivalent property are legitimate because labor is exchanged for labor. Money as a means of labor exchange is also legitimate and a useful improvement over barter. The problem comes in when property is used to appropriate the labor of others without equivalent labor in return. This happens when property rights are extended beyond use rights to include income rights. Income from property can take the forms of rent, profits, interest, money creation, and speculation. These are basically ways to get the labor of others without equivalent labor in exchange.

So to complete the work of liberalism we need to roll back property to use rights and money to labor exchange and then go forward from there. This will naturally be difficult to do and will meet a lot of resistance. Doing it too quickly could cause a lot of harm. Some approaches include replacing corporations with cooperatives, redistributing income from property and money, reducing taxes on labor, using taxes to pool resources for mutual aid, reclaiming abandoned property, reducing property rights on ideas, eliminating property rights on the genetic code, eliminating corporate welfare, regulating financial markets to reduce speculation, and removing money from politics. Eventually once the effects of income from property and money are reduced, property law can be changed to reflect the new realities.

Kuzminski's Utopia

Elimination of extremes of property and power.

Private property for all limited by personal use.

Direct democracy by local assemblies.

Confederation via recallable bottom up representatives.

Public monetary system with credit creation at the local level.

Loans only to individuals at a fixed 1.1 percent interest.

Money as a token of all the wealth of the community that can be exchanged.

Credit creation as an investment by the community in individuals.

No corporations, just partnerships of individuals.

See *Fixing the System, A History of Populism, Ancient and Modern* by Adrian Kuzminski.

Job Providers

Used to refer to employers. The implication is that we need to support the needs of job providers so they can provide the jobs we need.

We could change this to *job owners*. These are the people who own the jobs. They will allow us to use those jobs in return for a portion of the value we produce. *Job owners* suggests the term *slave owners*. Slave owners owned the labor of people as well as having control over their whole life. We no longer have this, but job owners still own the labor of others because they own the opportunity to provide that labor to the market.

This suggests the question: Why shouldn't we own our own jobs?

Theft By Property

How the World Really Works

This brief essay is for those who want to know how the world really works and to become rich or stay rich by that knowledge. There are basically four kinds of people, the rich who know, the rich who don't know, the rest who know, and the rest who don't know. We want to be the rich who know. We want to be clear eyed and to face reality. Then we can prosper, and we can know how to deal with the others.

First, a few common sense observations. There is no inherent biological difference between the rich and the rest. There are some natural variations of strength, skill, and cunning, but basically we are all just people. We are bundles of language, experience, and desire meandering our way through space and time. We all share this earth and we all require the cooperation of others to survive. We can't survive alone. And if we are rich, it is because the rest permit us to remain rich. We can only physically control what we have in our hands at any point in time. And even that could be easily taken from us. So we require a system that supports our wealth. We need to understand that system and know how to work it.

It all starts with the concepts of property and theft. Property is that which it is theft to take without permission. Most all societies agree that theft reduces all of our abilities to survive.

In the beginning we all had to work to survive, and there was no surplus to speak of. If I do the work to gather some fruit and it is taken from me, I might die or my children might die. This runs up against my primary survival instinct. That fruit is my property, and I have the right to use it.

Now expand this to working in a field. I did the work. If someone else just came and started replanting the same field or later came back and took my crops, that is not a situation that could last long.

This is the basic concept of property for use. It is my property as long as I am using it. It would be physically impossible for two people to eat the same bite of food, and once we are up to agriculture, it is not very practical to have two people planting and replanting the same piece of ground. These are physical limits that affect our basic survival.

So property for use is a deep concept in our thinking and practice. We can't really do without it. And so the idea that theft is wrong is pretty much universal. Most everyone will agree. But this is not enough for us to be truly rich. We can work harder and better than others and thus have more, but this can only go so far. It can be a basis, but the secret to wealth is something else.

Here is the secret. We need to expand the concept of property beyond what one person can physically use at one point in time to give us control over things we are not using directly or right now. Most cultures have extended property to personal possessions we keep with us. Many others extend property to our home and garden. Life is easier this way once we have accumulated a little surplus. But this is all still property for use.

Most people will accept that such property is legitimate and that taking it without permission is theft. But this is not the extension we need for true wealth. We need to extend the concept of property beyond use to things we are not ourselves personally using, but that others will nonetheless recognize that we own. The English philosopher L. T. Hobhouse called this property for power.

Now usually we want to do everything we can to blur the distinction between property for use and property for power, but since we are looking at things as they are here we need to know what we are doing. We need to be clear.

To be rich we need property that we control even though we are not personally using it. If property were limited to use this would be theft. Let's face it. But our goal is to redefine property to include property for power. Then we can become rich legally and above board and have the full protection of our "property" from "theft". And we have a powerful rhetorical tool since "Do not steal" is accepted by almost everyone.

Variations on the Basic Scam

It could be that priests were the first to discover the secret. A sacred grove or sacrifices to a god (which the priests could then use in the god's name) was a pretty good trick. The gods were entitled to the property and the priests, who served the gods, got their share.

Beyond this, perhaps priests or some strongman got control of a common village storehouse. Once they had control, they could determine their cut. Or since gods owned all the land, the

representatives of the gods could control the land on their behalf. This could be easier to do if there was the need for big projects like irrigation.

This evolved perhaps into the concept of kingdoms where the king owned all the land and doled it out to other warlords. This might be more in principle than in fact since property for use and the commons may have been more the day to day reality.

Over long periods of time people were taught and many accepted the idea that gods and god-like kings controlled the land. But there was still private ownership of small holdings for use. There might be peasant uprisings if this was pushed too far so that people's survival was at stake but usually a little force and the ongoing fear of force was enough to keep the system in place.

A lot of wealth is still tied to the land. By getting control of a huge plantation people without land would be forced to work for the plantation owner. Whatever improvements that are made to the land stay with the "owner".

So this is the first variation, get people to agree, however you do it, that they cannot use some resource without your permission. If they need to use it, you can claim some of their labor for the right to use it. They are spending some of their time working for you. Notice the beauty of the phrase "working for you". You have convinced others to work for you for no other reason than they accept that you "own" a resource they need to do the work they need to do to survive.

Land is the most basic resource that this can be done with. Expanding the idea out, we have water rights, mineral rights, hunting rights in a forest, wood gathering rights. These rights are backed up by force that is "legitimate" because to violate these rights is defined to be theft, which most people agree is wrong. The scam is to convince others that this applies to the expanded view of property.

So land is great, but an even better extension of property is to money, or more correctly, credit. Most people just deal with money as a store of their past labor that they can use in the future. It's useful for exchanges with others. The opportunity comes in if you can accumulate some money to lend to others at interest. You may be able to do this if you can accumulate this money from past labor or by income from land or other property. Once there is a money economy you can get money by renting your land, that is, getting income for no labor just because you own the land. Your money can grow more

quickly through compounding.

Another step forward for wealth creation was the creation of banks. First, you can make interest income from money you are holding for others. And with the advent of fractional reserve banking you can create money you are not even holding by creating an account and charging interest on the use of the account.

Once this credit system is in place, it is often found to be socially useful because it allows people to have a period of time where they can create something new without the need to work for their immediate survival. This could be done by the whole society in the form of credit unions and mutual banking. But if this happens, it removes the ability for private bankers to get rich. So this is an area the rich need to protect.

Beyond this is the whole area of gaining property in ideas through patents. This can be extended even to knowledge so that if you can get a patent on certain genetic information you can even profit from the products of evolution.

Another area of ownership is of a firm, as a corporation or some other form. A firm is a legal fiction that can be owned and in turn can own property. Since most people have no choice but to work for such firms for wages, if you can start such a firm or buy shares you can profit by what they produce without laboring yourself. Your property works for you.

One final area, if you are something of a gambler, is speculation on the prices of various things in markets. Buy low, sell high. You can even package up financial instruments and sell those to others to speculate on.

Money wealth is a wonderful thing. By having certain numbers registered in certain accounts, you can call on the labor of others. But let's be real. There is a reason it is called "unearned income". To keep this all going, we need to keep this expanded definition of property alive and well.

Making It a Fact of Nature

Now we need to consider how to deal with the four kinds of people mentioned earlier. We are the rich who know. We know how the world really works. But unless we can keep this system going, we can loose it all since we ultimately depend on the agreement of others that our wealth is in fact our own.

The rich who do not know believe that everything they have is totally legitimate, even natural or ordained by God. You can have common cause with them to protect the system, which is in their interest also. But there is little reason to disabuse them of their belief in their entitledness. They might start doubting themselves and spreading dangerous ideas around. So work with them but don't inform them.

The rest who don't know are not much of a problem as long they can continue to survive and not rebel. Bread and circuses is the age old strategy. We need to distract them and encourage them to believe that they too can become rich and that whatever small property they have would be threatened if any property is challenged. We need to constantly blur the distinction between property for use and property for power. They should not even have a way of talking about such a distinction.

As for the rest who know, we need to keep them marginalized, thought of as kooks or impractical utopians. Or we need to convince them that there is no alternative to this system. Change will not work or will be too dangerous. We need to counteract situations where they are uniting or getting their ideas spread to others. If all of this does not work, force may be needed, ideally legitimized by the government.

The long con is to make this property system seem natural, just, inevitable. We need to fund intellectuals through foundations or publishing their books or getting them jobs at universities. They need to provide the narratives and intellectual practices that will channel thinkers into lines of thought that do not endanger the property system. There should not even be a vocabulary for talking about alternatives that does not sound crazy. We also need to make sure all mass media just assumes this system and backs up the narrative of property.

Don't Kill the Goose

One final cautionary point. When we are feeling powerful, we may go too far. There can be unrest and doubt, but not to the extent that the majority of people become so concerned that they are looking for alternatives. We must not threaten their survival or basic comforts. Also, they must have enough to spend to keep the system going. How else can we continue to skim off the top?

The rich who don't know may be particularly careless in this respect. We need to protect property, cut taxes on wealth, and keep standing

armies ready to defend our interests. But we also need to keep the rest alive, working, and passive.

Schweickart's Utopia

Both political and economic democracy.

The basic model: worker self-management, markets, and social control of investment.

Worker self-management means that workers have democratic control of their workplaces.

This could take the form of worker cooperatives, but with capital assets owned by the whole society.

Workers in effect rent these common capital assets by paying a flat asset tax.

Workers get paid from the profits their firm makes in the market.

Investment comes from the asset taxes and is distributed by public investment banks.

Banks invest based on a risk assessment and in order to assure full employment.

Profits from the banks go back into the investment fund.

There is no private investment or private ownership of capital assets.

The funds are distributed on a per capita basis to regions and then localities by legislatures.

Some of the investment funds are retained for public infrastructure projects.

Public employees are paid from general tax revenues.

Fair trade between nations which favors the least developed countries.

See *After Capitalism* by David Schweickart.

Arrival

When Wes woke up, the ancient maglev pod he was riding had already docked in the little transient camp close to the station. It was a fresh morning in early July and the pod had opened some windows to let in the morning air. He got up from the bed and stretched. He told the pod he needed the toilet and to clean up and it shifted into a bathroom. He took care of the morning essentials and then went out onto a wooden deck. There were three other pods he could see. Two were tinted opaque. Late sleepers probably. He rummaged around in his little cloth travel bag and pulled out a tablet.

Some black raspberries were ready to pick close by. There was also a warning about tick season, but he had already adjusted his herb mix to make him repellent to ticks, fleas, and other local insect life. He found a small pantry at the station, got a bowl, and went for the berries. There was a very large patch near the station. Back at the pantry he found hazelnuts and processed some into nut milk and poured part of it onto the berries. The rest he poured onto some muesli. After eating, he cleaned up the dishes and strolled out of the station. It was a short walk into the village, so he set out.

Yellow Springs was still laid out in its original street pattern. They had preserved most of the buildings. Unlike some other settlements it didn't blend in so much into the local landscape. You didn't have to figure out which mound of earth or clump of trees was a house. Here the boundaries were quite clear.

Some people were out and about. He exchanged greetings with a few he passed. He checked his tablet and found a storeroom where he could get some shoes. His were worn out. He found a pair his size and left his old ones in a recycle bin.

He headed toward an area where several of the fabricators were housed. Like any settlement, fabricators were spread around at convenient locations, but it was natural for some to be clustered in particular areas. He already knew all about the fabricators in Yellow Springs. That was why he was here.

Of course, he could have spent some time roaming around, getting to know the area and the people. The people here had let it be known they wanted some new residents. Just people to add to the diversity, and to the gene pool. The local ecosystem could support it and the people wanted it. They even wanted to slightly increase their community fertility. Wes currently had his fertility turned off and in any case he was more interested in their machines right now.

He came to a little group of buildings and headed toward one of them. There was an old man sitting on a bench drinking from a

mug.

"Good morning," the old man said.

Wes sat down next to him on the bench.

"Good morning."

"Just in?" the old man ask.

"Yes, this morning, still at the pod camp."

"Staying for a while, then?"

"I expect, for a while at least."

"Well, welcome. I'm Jones."

"Wes."

"Fab addled, are you?"

"A bit."

"Sorry. But I have to admit to a bit of that affliction myself."

"Any work?"

"Yes, I could reduce my hours some. Like to do a little foraging myself, and food forest design. Some of the other fabtechs would like to diversify a bit, too."

Of course, Wes already knew all this. There was work needing done that he liked doing, and could do well.

"Guess I'll take a few tasks, then," he said.

"Last time I looked, there were some that needed doing." And Jone gave him a wink.

Around lunch time Wes was feeling a little hungry. He set the status on his pod to unused and checked his tablet. There were several community dining rooms in the village. One had chicken enchiladas. Like most people, Wes mostly ate vegan, but a little variety was also good.

The dining room was pretty full when he got there. Apparently this was a popular dish. He got some food and found a place. He exchanged greetings with the people around him and started eating.

Wes was not much of a talker, so he just listened in on the conversations. He felt at ease with the people even though he didn't know any of them. They didn't know him either, but there were subtle cues that he was welcome here and it was assumed that he knew how to function and that he would do his part. Otherwise, he would be left to join into the community life in his own way.

He found a small unused cottage, set its status to used, and settled in. He preferred a separate house to an apartment or dormitory. When he was young and had spent most of his time learning, he had liked a dormitory better. But now, if there was a small house, he would go for that. And in Yellow Springs they had housing ready for the new residents they wanted.

He found a hand cart by a storehouse near the cottage and picked up a few household and pantry items and carted them to his

new home. After unloading he laid down, read some from an old novel on his tablet, and drifted off to sleep.

Prospects

We all live within our own concrete regions of language, experience, and desire. None of us has the right to impose our desires on others. From the personal to the economic to the political there are no legitimate rulers.

But getting to a society without rulers is a problem. First, you can't force people to be free. They have to choose it for themselves. Most people are resigned to living with rulers. They just wish they had better ones. And rulers won't make it easy. Tactics that have been tried in the past have not worked. At best, there have been marginal improvements, however welcome.

So the prospects are not good. What is left is individual choices, to resist and evade rulers, to not act like a ruler, to refuse to play the domination game. Hopefully enough others will eventually join in so that rulers will no longer be able to rule.

Dealing With Rulers

Ignore them

Like the guy who claims to be Napoleon, they are a little crazy. Let the lunatics rant. Hopefully you can just walk away. The long term solution is not to oppose rule with counter rule, but for rule to stop working due to lack of participation.

Don't tell them what you think

Their concern is really touching, but be aware that usually when they are after your opinion they are really after ways to manipulate you or to single you out.

Don't accept what they tell you

It is in their interest to define you or to provide you with narratives that will lead you to do what they want. Be aware. Think for yourself. Create your own vocabulary and texts. Determine the facts as best you can. Don't rely on their version.

Recognize indirect rule

People who don't have direct, formal power over you, will often try to rule indirectly. Rule by money. Rule by property. Rule by reputation. Rule by talking loudest. Rule by expertise in some new dogma. Rule by obfuscation. Rule by controlling information or interpretations. Rule by becoming a minion of other rulers. Rule by implied threats. Be aware and don't play the domination game.

Do the minimum

Sometimes you are in a forced situation. You can't avoid the rulers. They have control over something that you want or need, or they can threaten you with direct harm. Do what you have to, but just what you have to. Try to maintain your integrity to the extent you can, if only within your own mind.

Do what you would have done anyways

We all need mutual aid to survive. Most of us want to do something useful. We often like working together on projects. We like to develop and make use of our skills. If we can't do this in the context of voluntary associations, we can do what we would have done anyways to give us some space within forced situations. We can treat each other as free individuals and try not to be tainted by the environment we are forced to operate in.

Break your dependencies on them

One reason we get into forced situations is that we can't afford to just walk away. We have allowed rulers to make us dependent on access to systems they control. There are some things we can do. We can live more simply, avoid debt as much as possible, have some savings, get access to land or housing that we don't have to pay someone to use. We can create and support alternative voluntary associations for mutual aid. But we shouldn't fool ourselves. This is a long road.

Disobey

Ultimately the solution to stopping rulers is to simply stop doing what they say. They can't be rulers if no one will allow themselves to be ruled by them. We should quietly disobey when we can. Let them imagine they have control. But sometimes it is necessary to disobey publically, to make a point. They may back down, thinking to maintain control in other areas by giving a little in this area. We make it a problem for them, and hopefully open up more regions of autonomy. Also, we need to give each other courage. If we see others disobeying, we may join in. But we need to be careful to not harm others, and thus to become rulers ourselves. Also, this makes people fear disobedience and to side with the rulers. Again, we shouldn't fool ourselves that this will work quickly. It is a long term strategy.

Play them against each other

This is tricky. Often rulers are in competition with each other. Some rulers may be less oppressive than others. When we have a choice, should we choose our rulers? We can choose who will be our boss. We can vote for one politician over another. In the end though, we are still ruled, but the cage may be a little more pleasant. This is not a reliable solution, but it can be part of trying to make our immediate conditions a little better. Let's face it, our prospects are not good for an ultimate solution in our lifetime.

The Mutual

"Morning, Kro."

"Hello, Ruth. Ready to take sides?"

"I never take sides. I'm always completely impartial."

Kropotkin Jones gave her a slight smirk and went on inside. He was the first in this morning. He made some coffee and sat at his desk. A lot of email as usual. Life Ventures was still after them, still insisting on seeing them as a company to be bought. Somehow their activities could be monitored. No, no, not really.

The mutual was not an organization with a budget, a bank account, a staff. No money ever exchanged hands, not even barter. It was more a process, a flow of information, the ant's chemical trail, the bee's dance. People freely gave to the mutual and took from the mutual, but the mutual in itself never had anything. There were store rooms spread around town, offices, files, Web sites, but the mutual didn't own any of these. And yet it was an important part of the local economy. The mutual was a name for the interactions of the individuals who for however long chose to interact in this particular way.

Ruth and Sanjay appeared at Kro's desk.

"Natasha says she'll need this space back in a few weeks," said Sanjay.

"Well, we knew it was coming. We can all work at home until something opens up," said Kro.

"We don't need a fixed space. If they ever try to shut us down, we just won't be there," said Ruth.

"It was nice, though. We can go back to assemblies in the park when we need them," said Kro.

They all contemplated for a little and then went back to their individual tasks. Kro contributed his time mostly to running the software that let people know what was requested and what was available where and when, even down to when people were going to gather to sweep in and harvest some fruit from a public park.

Some people worried that others would take too much compared to what they put in and that the software should keep track of that, or that some kind of currency should be used. But that hadn't caught on. So far people seemed satisfied to just let the dynamics of the gift work itself out.

Associations

We are each unique configurations of language, experience, and desire. These configurations are our basic tools for living. Our associations with others are based on intersections of our configurations.

We can analyze our associations based on how our configurations intersect. If some parties in the association get more of their configuration included, then you have to ask why the others don't leave. It could be that they are getting something they need and that the alternatives are not any better.

The long term solution would seem to be to create more alternatives so that at least people can survive without remaining in an association they would rather leave.

One general point is that our configurations are just ours. Others have their own and usually would prefer not to have something else pushed on them. We can each resist or ignore such attempts. Truly voluntary associations would also help so we could more easily avoid such pushy people.

Rulers of Nature

There are none.

No rule over other people. No rule over nature. No rule over the past.
No rule over the surplus. No rule over the infrastructure. No rule over
ideas. No rule over social cooperation.

A Quanta of Activism

Try to understand what is happening. Don't be a ruler in your own personal life. Claim your own freedom. Free your own mind. Speak out when appropriate. Support alternative media. Join with others to resist oppression that you yourself are experiencing. If you are lucky in that respect maybe shift some money, if you have it, to other people's grassroots struggles. Attend meetings. Attend rallies. Attend vigils. Buy the least damaging products from the least damaging sources. Support alternatives if there are any. Choose the least worse rulers you can if rulers can't be avoided. Maybe engage in a little civil disobedience if you can afford to get arrested. Some may do more, some less, but this is pretty much all you can do.

Pitiful, isn't it?

Still, if you join your small part with others, over a long time, it can work. It is the growing and constant pressure sustained over time that eventually improves things. Nothing else ever really has.

Socialisms

The word socialism includes a variety of views and approaches. Probably most socialists would agree that they hope for a society organized to fairly benefit all the people in it, not organized in the interests of a privileged group or a ruling class. They may describe this in various ways. For example, they may have a goal of a society with no rulers and voluntary associations based on mutual aid. Or they might say they desire freedom, equality, and solidarity. Or they might want to have production for use, to meet the basic needs of all, not for the profit of a few. Or they might envision a future stateless and classless society. Or they might look for peace and social justice based on simple human decency and compassion. Most socialists would see that capitalism, imperialism, the current property system, and various forms of domination are obstacles to these goals and hopes.

Socialists may disagree on how to state their goals and they may have strong opinions on how exactly society functions, but the biggest disagreements are on strategy and tactics, on how change can happen, and on what would be acceptable intermediate goals. Some feel that they would betray their principles if they participated in any way in any system of domination. Others feel justified in breaking some eggs in order to get where they want in the long run. Others are more in the middle, seeing that they cannot avoid dealing with the current rulers and economic system. Still others, see that getting state power is fine as long as it is done via free elections. And there are those who think that everyone needs to agree with their particular doctrine before we can move forward.

These divisions at least diminish the effectiveness of socialist efforts. At worse they paralyze the movement. But it is not enough to say that everyone is right, because there are genuine differences. There needs to be debate and free discussion, and people need to be free to try different approaches. One approach is to not focus on fighting other socialists. Let them try their approach as long as they don't force it on others and we can see if they succeed. It is hard to know what will actually work. And maybe we can chip away at the big stone in many different ways. The point is to find something to you think might work over time and that is consistent with your principles and to do what you can to support it, given the realities of your actual, concrete life.

Voting

It can be argued that voting in elections is giving your stamp of approval to a corrupt system of domination and that it makes you complicit in any actions taken by the officials elected. And further, by boycotting the vote you could point out the illegitimacy of rulers.

However, given that we are already within such a system, if enough people with similar values to you do not vote, then domination may increase and mutual aid may decrease. It could then be argued that by not voting you are making things worse for yourself and others.

Also, voting in elections is similar to getting a job. In both cases you are picking a ruler to the extent that you really have a choice. Which ruler you pick may have a big impact on your life. Of course, you probably depend on a job for survival, whereas voting is less tied to your survival.

Voting in elections also has some similarity to strikes and other methods of pressuring rulers to be less harsh or to improve conditions. It need not be viewed as an endorsement of rulers or the system of domination. It could be viewed as one more tactic of applying pressure and as a form of self-defense against even worse rulers.

But suppose that going beyond just voting you run for office and become a ruler yourself. You may argue that you can improve things from the inside. Then as so often happens you become corrupted by the system you are trying to change, and you betray those who trusted you.

So the logic in favor of voting could be used to justify running for office, with bad consequences. Voting could be entering on a slippery slope. It seems like voting itself though has less of a potential for corruption.

So you decide that given the circumstances you will vote while fully understanding that fundamental change will not likely come from politicians. Voting after all does not involve that much time. You can still put most of your efforts elsewhere. You need not get pulled into the campaign or contribute money. Just vote. It is a small thing that might help a little.

Revolution

A revolutionary is someone who advocates and works toward radical change. For example, they might propose that property be replaced with a system of use rights or that hierarchical power structures be eliminated. Such changes would fundamentally change how we live.

The means advocated to bring about such changes can vary widely. Some might argue that force should be used while others would say that you can't force people to be free. A violent revolution would likely leave us with just another set of bosses.

So maybe the way forward is to prefiguratively create new structures while we resist the old structures to the degree we can, and at most defend ourselves if attacked. Revolution does not have to mean violence and in fact violence is really the status quo, not a radical change.

This kind of revolution does require massive support though. A significant portion of the population needs to start thinking and living in new ways. It could happen quickly, but most likely it will not.

A Social Change Strategy

Background

In looking at the history of social change, a few things stand out. First, change occurs within the old system. For example, capitalism developed within feudalism and agriculture developed within the context of hunting and gathering.

Second, the economy must support the change. For example, if there is a general insurrection or peasant revolt, once supplies start running low, people will revert back to what they know, to survive and to provide basic comforts. Any revolution must first address the issue of bread. If a mechanism is not in place that people know how to operate within to meet their needs, they will eventually go back, no matter how angry they are.

Third, change requires many people behaving differently. It is possible to have a small cadre, but if they do not have mass support, they will just become the new tyrants. And if the goal is to move beyond domination, you can't force it. People have to choose to be free. This requires a mass movement where people know how to operate in the new system because they have already been doing it in some way in their previous life.

Finally, it takes a while for people to learn new behaviors. So if self-management is to be the new norm, people already have to have experience with self-management or it will break down and bosses will naturally take over and people will accept it because things need to get done. People need an organizational context that prefigures the goal behaviors.

Given these considerations, here is a general strategy for moving beyond the current system. It will not be easy and it will take a long time. Something like this has already been underway for over a hundred years and progress has been slow, but there has been some progress. We need to keep hope alive and we need to be in it for the long term.

Resist domination

Find chinks in the systems of control. Push the limits. You may need to fall back and retrench, but always be testing the boundaries. Question domination in all areas of life from the political to the

economic to the personal. When an opportunity arises to be more free, actively seize it. When others are making progress, support them. When others are being oppressed, speak out for them. And learn yourself to operate without domination, in your family life, in your relationships, and in any other area where you can make your own choices. Join with others to protest and build alternatives.

Expand democracy

If we want to move beyond rulers and domination, then we need to be able to consult together and make our own group decisions. So always look for opportunities for self-management and to expand democratic approaches into new areas. Study group decision making and put what you learn into practice. Don't fall back into letting other people run things. Where some form of democracy does exist, use it to reduce corruption and make it more responsive. But don't depend on so-called democracy that is really a form of rule by money. Democracy needs to be a home grown affair.

Prefer mutual aid

Mutual aid is the basis of our social evolution. Even as markets have taken over more and more of economic life, there has always been a residual of mutual aid. Whenever you have a choice, choose an approach that is closer to mutual aid in where you work and who you buy from. Give first preference to individual producers, cooperatives, and self-managed non-profits. If these are not available, then give preference to smaller organizations where the distance between workers and bosses is less and there is more responsiveness to consumers, social needs, and the environment. If these are not available, choose firms with a good record and that have competitors to keep them honest. As a last resort, go to the monopolies and other toxic firms. You may not be able to avoid them, but try your best. At the same time, support organizations that promote solidarity economics or community based planning. Get practice in economic planning and actively deciding what products and services are needed based on human need.

As an example, health care from a federation of health care cooperatives run by patients, doctors, nurses, and other health care workers would be the best. If that is not available, then non-profits with universal access. If that is not available, then some kind of universal health insurance like Medicare for All. If that is not available, then at least make sure everyone can afford decent health insurance. The worse case is to be left to the tender mercies of private for profit firms.

As another example, put your money into credit unions instead of for profit banks, but also seek the wealth of mutual aid and the gift economy. Try to get what you need and give others what they need without a recourse to money.

Yet another example. If you have to work in a less favorable environment at least join a union or start one if you can, and support others who are trying to do the same. Try to move your union in the direction of greater democracy and self-management. Federate with other unions to give each other support.

In all areas of the economy try to encourage production for human needs, not for the profits of a few. If enough people prefer these as places to work or to buy and try to create them if they don't exist, then this sector can grow within the market system and eventually displace more and more of it. Then if there is some sudden fracture that presents an opportunity we will have the skills and economic base we need to move the majority of our economy in this direction and phase out the rest.

Prioritize basic needs science

We need knowledge to help us better meet our needs. Ideally we can learn to devote less and less of our time to meeting all our needs until we get to a post scarcity economy. But this requires active, conscious research to develop the knowledge and to train people on how to make use of it. Knowledge should be available to all and priority for research work should be given to making sure everyone's basic needs are met in an efficient, humane, and enjoyable way, with ample leisure time for all. Make basic needs science your avocation. If you are in a position to influence research directions, give priority here. And if you are a researcher, consider some area of basic needs science as your area.

Unfortunately, today research that can increase profits or make war more effective is prioritized. We need to fight this as best we can.

Defend gains

Whatever progress we make will be considered a threat by those who most benefit from the current system. Unfortunately, they will also have the money and power to try to turn back our gains. We need to defend ourselves against such attempts. The key here is organized numbers, enough to make rulers listen, enough to refuse to cooperate and make it stick, and as a last resort enough to repel physical attacks.

Increase numbers

We need more people. This is a problem because people are most focused on just living their life. They don't want a lot of extra bother. Some people want to be activists, but most people will not want to join them. So while it may make sense to try to find more activists, the most important thing is to provide ways for people to get their needs met in a different way. Most people probably do not want to be bossed around, to be always in a precarious economic position, and to be constantly running just to make ends meet. A lot of people would prefer a different system, but they don't want to become activists. They just want to live their lives. This needs to be clearly understood and not in a grumpy or condescending way. If all we really have to offer people is a life of struggle with no clear chance of success, we will not grow. So if we want a system that meets human needs, we need to create systems that meet human needs. We need to prefigure that in the alternatives we put in place. Once people find their place in these systems, they will do their part, if their part is not too onerous. And they will turn to the alternatives if the alternatives are really better.

Fatal flaw

Unfortunately, this may have led us to a fatal flaw. On the one hand, force is morally wrong and won't work. People must choose the change to be the change we want. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that enough people will want to choose a new system unless it is already in place and ready to adopt.

Maybe the rulers of the current system will be foolish enough to let it get so bad that there will be mass defections. But that has not happened up to now. In fact, attempts to reform the current system have served to extend its life so that while it may be bad, it is easy to imagine worse. And alternatives are often watered down and coopted.

Some people, getting frustrated with this, will want to take actions to destroy the system, but these actions end up strengthening the hand of rulers and harming the very people they are theoretically trying to help.

So we seem to be left with radical enclaves that could be a nucleus for something new, but only if the surrounding system collapses, and in the meantime are little more than a lifestyle choice, or attempts at partial solutions that serve to strengthen the current system, at least for a while, by making it less harsh.

But we need to keep in mind that whatever improvements we do have have come from pressure against rulers so that they withdraw and allow more free space. Seemingly radical enclaves become examples that free the imagination and others try to live like that too. And sometimes pressure for improvements, like the eight hour work day, are won, and they become a starting place for further pressure.

So at times it may seem hopeless. It is definitely not an easy or quick process. But something along these lines can work.

Liberating Configurations

Our lives are sequences of configurations of language, experience, and desire. Our configurations frequently overlap or are shared with others. Configurations contain subconfigurations.

A configuration is liberated if there are no rulers within that configuration. Liberation of a configuration often proceeds by the liberation of its subconfigurations until there are no more rulers in the entire configuration. Partial liberation is liberation of some of the subconfigurations.

Liberation of one configuration can also branch into contiguous configurations. So liberating a configuration no matter how small or how temporarily can spread freedom so that more and more configurations have no rulers.

Something as simple as holding a sign on a street corner which communicates an uncoerced message is a small liberation that can spread. Free associations of friends without domination can be a foothold.

Tactics and approaches can be diverse and variable. At times applying pressure on one set of rulers to reign in another set of rulers may be necessary. At other times rulers may concede some territory because we have made it too difficult to maintain control there. They may concede a demand in order to preserve some level of control with the hope of regaining what they lost later.

The thing is to always be looking for a corner that can be freed and to find others that want to share that freedom with you in more and more contexts.

A whole society without rulers though is most likely a very distant prospect because domination also has its ways of forcing its way back in and smothering free zones. One view of history is of this constant organic growth and decline.

Comprehensive Libertarianism

Comprehensive libertarianism is based on two main principles, no aggression and no usury. Aggression is initiating force against others in order to make them do what you want. Force used in defense against such aggression is not aggression. Some libertarians limit aggression to physical force, threat, or fraud. Comprehensive libertarians recognize that there are other indirect forms of aggression, in particular, usury.

Usury is stealing the labor of others. It is possible because of monopolies. Monopolies grant exclusive control of things others need to do their work, for example, money, natural resources, tools, markets, and knowledge. This often takes the form of interest, rent, profits, tariffs, and patents. Monopolies can only be maintained by force, often by a monopoly of force in the form of government. Property becomes a form of monopoly when it moves beyond personal use.

Money is a measure of the amount of labor in the form of products and services we agree to provide to others. Those with money have credit. That is, others are in debt to them in the sense that they agree to provide products and services to them at which point the money passes to them and they now have an increase in their credit.

Money is created when a group of people decide to grant credit to a member of their exchange group. They do this most often to give that person access to the resources they need to produce something the whole group will benefit from. That person agrees to pay back the money plus a small fee just large enough to pay for the labor of those who administer the granting of such credit. The cost of the loan is added to the cost of the products or services and thus the circle is complete.

The exchange group might also grant credit to those who through no fault of their own can't work or can't sell enough of what they produce to avoid poverty. In this case, the money does not need to be paid back. The whole group is in effect giving some of their labor to prevent poverty. This would seem to be a wise course because any of the group could be in that position at some point and it helps to avoid some of the social problems that come from poverty.

If the exchange group is wealthy enough and has enough social cohesion so that freeloaders are not too much of a concern, it may be

less costly and intrusive to just grant all members a guaranteed income that will be enough to avoid poverty and the poverty level can move up as the group becomes more secure.

This system of money management could be called mutual banking because banks are associations for managing loans and money creation. It is mutual banking because it is run for the mutual benefit of its members, not for the benefit of some privileged owners who have been granted a monopoly that allows them to steal the labor of others.

Before we had money we relied on the exchange of gifts of labor. This can work well if we can be reasonably assured that people will in fact give roughly equivalent gifts in the future for the gifts they have received. This can work in small groups or through elaborate customs and social norms. It could also work well if scarcity were not a concern because, for example, automation is so advanced that little labor is required. In those situations volunteers would want the work because they enjoy it or because of the status it brings.

If we ever do get to a post scarcity economy, then it could get to the point that money is no longer useful and we might prefer to move to such a gift economy. In the mean time a mutual banking system allows us to exchange our labor without restricting ourselves to small scale economies or to the heavy hand of customs designed to discourage freeloaders.

Best Guess

As an individual, there is little that you can do to change the future in a big way. Even if you end up being the leader of a mass movement or get control of a powerful institution, no matter how hard you worked for it, your placement there will have been due to forces well beyond your control.

So if you ever end up in such a position it would be good to avoid imagining that because something happened, you made it happen or you deserve it. You may have done what you could with whatever advantages you had, but the end result was not all you.

It is even more difficult to control large social, economic, or ecological forces. While the aggregate of all our choices will likely have had a big impact, our individual choices can't do much unless many other people do the same.

And the tendency is for people to continue to do whatever they have been doing unless their circumstances change from the outside.

Given this, the best you can do is to prepare for your best guess of what might happen and hope that others might do the same so that you can together make something happen.

Here are a few best guesses.

Governments and the majority of people will let ecological collapse and depletion of oil and other resources continue.

Those with money will continue to use debt and investment decisions to force most people to use their labor to enrich the few and destroy the planet.

This system will collapse, but it will not happen evenly or all at once. It will be chaotic and messy. Some people will do better or will be able to withdraw into pleasant enclaves while the conditions of most people worsen.

Globalization will continue at some level, but increasingly people and localities will be cut off.

There will continue to be various groups and movements trying to change things or to put alternatives in place. Some of these may

become the kernel for what comes next, but it is hard to know which. Most will remain weak, so they will not be able to provide a way of life we can rely on for some time.

Assuming that something like this happens, there are various approaches you could take.

Just keep on doing what you are doing. Let the future generations deal with it. Hope you are gone before it gets too bad.

Ride the system down. Be one of the people in the pleasant enclaves.

Be a professional critic of the current system. Move from action to action. Live on the fringes or do whatever job you have to to enable your activism. Maybe find a niche in academia or a non profit.

Drop out to the extent possible. Get some land and form alternative communities. Keep away from debt and dependence on money income. Try to be locally self reliant.

Try to avoid debt. Learn to live simply. Make local connections and do what you can to support local self reliance. At the same time try to find a niche in the money economy which contributes to real human needs. Contribute what you can to alternatives, to resistance, and to reform. Keep hope alive. Live your life.

No Rulers

No domination, exploitation, or oppression. No authority backed by force. No hierarchies, masters, bosses, or owners. No privileged few. No monopolies of natural resources, money, tools, ideas, or exchange. No rent, interest, profits, patents, or tariffs. No propaganda or attempts at mind control. No tyranny over one or over multitudes. No property beyond use. No production for profits that blocks production for use and to meet human needs. No production for profits. No direct or indirect control of others or of what they need to live. No theft of labor. No forced associations. No forcing of our desires on others. No covert control of mutual aid or surplus production to skim off the labor of others. No physical or mental torture. No using the desires of others to control them. No direct or indirect aggression. No turning an administrative function into a mini dictatorship. No dictatorship of the proletariat. No dictatorship of any kind. No money from anything other than your own labor or from freely given gifts. Better yet, no money. No freeloading. No manipulation. No new boss same as the old boss. No vanguard. No force beyond self defense. No passive aggression. No decision processes that force conformity. No blocking of decisions as a way to control others. No bullying or abuse. No forced political correctness. No excessive use of shunning. No guilt tripping. No submersion of disagreement.

Free Zones

A free zone is some aspect of human life that is more free of the control of rulers than surrounding aspects. It may be as small as the thoughts of a single individual. It may grow to a circle of friends and family where for whatever reason the individuals involved choose to associate without domination or hierarchy, or where at least the mini dictators can be ignored or kidded out of it.

A free zone is most usually imbedded within or at least surrounded by more oppressive zones. They are often ephemeral, temporary, and weak. Cracks and spaces where they can grow are rediscovered again and again. Each generation seems to discover rebellion as if for the first time.

Often for an authoritarian association to exist there needs to be free zones threaded through it. For example, there sometimes exists a core of equality and mutual aid among some of the employees of a capitalist firm. Sometimes owners and managers recognize this and try to expropriate it as "teamwork", but equally often they either consciously or unconsciously undermine it by creating internal competition for positions in the hierarchy or for pay.

More complete free zones such as self-employment or worker cooperatives are usually embedded within capitalist markets that press them to conform in order to be able to access resources or find customers. They are also often in need of capital and become enslaved to banks or investors.

Self-managed nonprofits similarly may need to compete for contributions and become professionalized bureaucracies.

Voluntary associations where the clients and the members are the same people and that are run mostly on voluntary labor and mutual aid are more free, as are street parties, open mike nights, really free markets, free internet archives, and open source software projects.

A local cafe where people can freely gather, discuss, sing, dance, recite poetry, and create unmediated culture can be a free zone even if you need to buy some coffee or tea to keep the place going.

This can be taken further with occupations of public spaces to foraging on unused land to guerilla gardening to squatting abandoned buildings to occupying and running an abandoned work place to

liberating and publishing government secrets to freely making use of corporate patents.

Some free zones rulers will tolerate. Some they will commercialize or bring under government supervision. Some they will invade and try to close down.

It is a constant struggle to create and defend new free zones, to expand their scope, and to demonstrate to others that they can do the same. Hopefully these free zones can spread organically as more people choose to liberate some aspect of their life and join with others for mutual aid and companionship.

There may be times in human history when particular free zones can quickly expand, when systems of domination are weakened and frayed. At such times larger numbers of people may turn to them and defend them. This will only be possible if enough people have continued all the struggles for a free zone here and a free zone there, giving them room, cultivating them, learning how to live without domination and rulers in more and more aspects of their lives.

After the Dust

Law and Order

I was probably the first to encounter the dust, while it was confined to Yellow Springs and a little ways into the surrounding countryside.

I was doing the late shift, sitting in my patrol car. I felt something where my gun was. Something funny was happening. I turned on the interior light and unholstered my gun. It seemed light. Then it just crumbled in my hand.

The next day we found all the police weapons were dust or missing. We checked with some gun owners we knew and their guns were also gone. Even a sword collector I know, his swords were dust.

That same day we had some need for backup and some officers started out from Xenia and had their weapons turn to dust at some unseen line.

At that time the border to the dust zone, as we started calling it, was only in a circle around Yellow Springs, not yet reaching any other towns.

So that was a mystery that others started to study. We just kept doing our jobs. We carried our saps, and people had the habit of compliance. But that also started to change.

I was called out on a drunk and disorderly. The offender took a swing at me and I lifted my sap in self defense. It dissolved in my hand when I made a motion toward him.

How can you enforce the law when you can't use force? We could travel in packs, but there developed a sort of informal code of the "fair fight". People started stepping in if the combatants were unmatched in strength or numbers or if it looked like someone was coming to serious harm. And as our authority started to wear thin this same code was applied to us.

I still remember a few months later when we were called out to a trespassing case. Some squatters had taken up residence in an empty house. When we got there a crowd wouldn't let us go in the house. They kept saying "use it or lose it", like property rights meant nothing.

The chief stayed, as some kind of mediator. The rest of us either resigned or moved out of the dust zone, where an officer can still do his job.

The Mad Dust Maker

We have yet to find out the origin of the dust. We do now know what it is. It consists of a large number of self replicating nanotech devices. We are only starting to understand the various functions of the devices and how they work together.

Some are detectors. Some exhibit swarming behavior. Some are disassemblers. The aggregate behavior is well known, the destruction of weapons and swarming and destroying other objects that threaten humans. Other than that the dust seems harmless and is just like any other dust particles.

The dust zone is spreading slowly out from its starting point in Yellow Springs, Ohio. The rate of spread is increasing. As of this writing it has encircled most of southwestern Ohio.

As of yet we have not found a way to stop it or contain it without using extreme measures that would kill most of the life in the affected areas. Although the devices do have electronic components they seem hardened in some way, immune to electromagnetic interference. They are powered by a combination of solar and kinetic systems. Just blowing in the wind or being walked on seems to power them, as does exposure to light and certain other electromagnetic waves.

No one has claimed credit for these wonders of technology. Whoever it is must be working in a related field somewhere, unless you credit alien origin theories, which this writer does not.

Running a Store

Cash items need to be locked up or watched closely. Shoplifters are not prosecuted any more. Some people think if they need something, they should just be able to take it. Still most people don't want to actually manhandle items away from us. They know we had to pay for them. There are also free items. Some of the local producers have decided to just give away the surplus they can't sell. We give them shelf space for their "really free market", out of the elements.

So there is developing a hybrid cash and gift economy. Credit is not much used anymore since most people stopped paying debts owed to commercial banks, just personal loans from people they know or from

credit unions which only charge administration fees. Interest is frowned on and called "usury". People also refuse to pay rent. I have to admit that we don't pay rent for the store either.

Out of zone suppliers still deliver given checks written on national bank accounts. We still have enough cash business for that. We can make a living, and if things get tight, there are the free shelves, especially for food. We are becoming more self reliant in food production if you settle for what grows here.

The Money Block

We have great hopes that the dust will give us our chance for a truly free society, a society without domination or hierarchy, a society without rulers. We are well on our way. Most physical force is gone. There is still the chance for fist fights or of being outnumbered, but this is really not as much of a concern as you might think. People have gotten braver. They will stand up to bullies now that the bullies don't have weapons, and most people are not bullies. That's a character flaw we feel we can deal with.

But it's harder to deal with a more subtle violence, money. Money was always a problem. It is less of a problem now, but it is still here. Since the police "force" has stopped being able to enforce property law most people have stopped paying rent and feel justified in occupying housing, land, or work spaces that are not in use. People who are actually using some "property" are left alone. We all need a place to live and work. There are enough people who will block an eviction either by the police or some bullies who want to take over some space that others have done the work on to make it usable or how they want it.

So this is all a huge step forward, but there still remains the fact that we can't produce all we need. We have a good start on food production, building maintenance, simple mechanics, and some things like pottery, but we can't produce all our own tools or solar arrays. And most of our electricity is not local solar. We are still on the grid for power, for internet, for shipping and receiving. And all that has to be paid for with money.

A lot of us are debt strikers. We refuse to pay mortgages, school loans, and credit card debt. I think we are justified there. That was all a scam from the beginning. But there are consequences. Our credit is shot. Our credit cards are canceled. We can't get any kind of commercial loan. Because of these issues, some people in the zone

have been careful to pay all debts and still live mostly on money. Their jobs are tied to the larger economy. We can't really blame them. That's their choice. Many of them are our customers. And there is not much software development or industrial design needed for local use here in the zone itself.

Take me. I operate a CSA with some friends. We can't sell all we produce. We largely feed ourselves from what we grow. But we still buy oil, spices, and some grains and other staples we don't produce. And we need tools. We still use tractors for some heavy work. It is too back breaking to do everything by hand. All those things require money.

We are taking the initiative toward gift economics. We haul some of our surplus into the free shelves. We give to our neighbors. They might help us out with what they can do in the future.

But money is blocking our ability to go much farther. At this point we are stuck. Some of us doubt the wisdom of gifting what we also are trying to sell. Why buy it if you can wait and get it for free? But we are always thinking about it. Maybe when the zone gets bigger. Some people are looking into fab labs for small scale local manufacturing of things we currently pay money for. We have people moving in all the time who want to give it a go. And people leaving this "lawless land". Their skills and interests need a little more backup. So money may become less necessary over time and the currency increasingly mutual aid. I personally believe we will get there.

A Request Economy

Suppose that we have an economy that at the physical level is much like our current economy, except that no payment is necessary, either using money or barter.

Let's then define four basic economic actors, individuals, stores, factories, and homes.

An individual is any person who participates in the economy. The whole purpose of the economy is to facilitate mutual aid among individuals.

A store is a place where individuals can go to get products or services, either for immediate use or to use somewhere else. An inventory of what is available, what has been used, and what has been requested is maintained. Requests can be made by any of the other economic actors. This generalized concept of a store includes warehouses, restaurants, and offices that provide services as well as what we would currently describe as retail stores.

A factory is a place where new products are produced from inputs. These inputs come to the factory from stores, other factories, or from natural resources at the site of the factory. An inventory of what has been used, what has been produced, what has been delivered, and what has been requested is maintained. Requests can be made by any of the other economic actors. This generalized concept of a factory includes such work sites as farms, mines, and offices as well what we currently call factories.

A home is a place where people live. A lot of work goes on in homes for immediate use by the people who live there. Work done in the home is a significant part of the economy.

Stores, factories, and homes are often located in a particular place, but they can also be mobile. For example, a road crew is a mobile factory.

Individuals are users and workers in the economy. Users use the products and services of the economy and make requests for products and services. Workers produce products and provide services and make requests for the products and services they need for their work. Workers democratically manage their own work.

Requests drive the economy. A request is given a priority by the

requester. Requests often form a network of dependencies. For example, a request for shoes will spawn requests by factories and stores throughout the economy. Requests are given priority in the economy by democratically determined formulas. Formulas may be modified as needed as new ideas for requests come in. Big projects are voted on directly rather than using a formula. All participants in the economy can vote. The economy is a social construct democratically managed by all its participants.

Users usually make requests to stores. If there is no economic actor that can meet the request, it goes to an economic actor with knowledge that is most relevant to the request. At that point a new product or service may be initiated, including starting new factories or stores.

Use of scarce products, services, or resources would likely need to be rotated or rationed.

Software makes this possible for a large, complex economy. This approach can also work for smaller and simpler economies without software.

An individual is a participant in the economy if they work on priority requests for a democratically determined amount of time. This time is adjusted so that everyone who is able to work can work. Those who are not able to work can still vote and make use of the products and services of the economy. Those who are able to work and do not will be given a democratically determined status. This may include access to a basic subsistence allowance. If a post scarcity economy is achieved, then no one will be required to work. There will be enough volunteers for any jobs left.

Underlying all this and making it possible is nature. Everyone has equal use rights to natural resources, including future generations. This implies that resources must be used in a sustainable way.

People who prefer not to participate in this economy are free to form their own economies as long as they respect these use rights.

Exchanges between economies should be mutually agreed upon by delegates from each economy. No force should be used.

Accounts

So much depends on numbers in a computer. We trust that the numbers will be there when we need them, that periodically the numbers will be added to, and that people will let us have what we need in return for a subtraction from our number and an addition to their's. And God help us if those numbers are not there, and we call, and the voice at the end of the line says we don't know you.

Use and Property

Use is a fundamental requirement for our existence. We need to use certain resources to survive and to experience a satisfactory degree of comfort. Resources have various use characteristics like whether they can be used many times or are used up on a single use, whether they can be used at the same time by multiple users or not, whether they are abundant or scarce, whether they come from natural processes, or whether we need to apply our labor to produce them. We also have varying degrees of need and desire for different kinds of resources.

Most fundamentally we need space to occupy. Two bodies can't occupy the same space at the same time. We need air to breath. Two people can usually breath the same air at the same time because it is fluid and abundant, but in a confined space it may be used up more quickly by more people. We need certain temperature ranges to survive. In some environments we need clothes or shelter to maintain these temperatures. Clothes and shelters have to be made and maintained. We need food to eat and water to drink. In certain natural settings these may be readily available, but usually we at least have to gather them.

So our labor becomes a major issue. We have only so much time and energy. If we put effort into producing or finding something, we can't use that effort to produce or find something else. At the same time, we know that we cannot usually survive long just on our own. We do much better if we help each other and share the results. Mutual aid is fundamental to our survival and comfort, and usually we enjoy the company of others.

We have learned over time some basic patterns of resource use and mutual aid. One basic pattern is that in cases in which something can only be used by one person at a time, things work better if we do not try to take the resource from them while they are using it. It works better to wait until they are not using it or to go get some other resource like it and use that one. For example, we could rotate the use of a tool, but only one person can eat the same bite of food at a time.

Special consideration must be given to the use of resources that require labor. Things or conditions that I have contributed my time, energy, and skill into producing in a real sense contain part of my life in them.

So I have a special claim to resources that I am currently using and to

resources that I contributed to the production of. This claim is basically a call on others to behave in a particular way toward specific resources. It is asking others to agree to respect my claim. Usually I also agree in turn to respect similar claims by others. Most societies have found that it works best to respect such claims. A violation of these claims is called theft, and societies agree to mutual protection from such violations.

This is only one aspect of group use management. Others may be such things as leaving a resource in good shape after you use it for others to use and sharing and rotating the use of natural resources or resources produced by our ancestors or by shared effort. Also my claim to a resource I contributed labor to may diminish over time. Suppose by my own efforts I cleared a plot and planted it and tended it. I have a special claim to that plot while the crops are growing and to the harvest. Next season, since I prepared that plot, I could claim first choice to the use of the plot. But over time, my claim diminishes. I have already benefited adequately from my labor and there is no real basis for me trying to prevent others from using a plot that I abandoned, unless I am trying to get them to give me something in return for that use. For example, I may try to extend my claim to the plot in order to make a claim on their labor. But surely that would be an excessive claim and it is hard to imagine why anyone would agree to it unless they were forced to.

Here we are at the boundary between use rights and property rights. Rights are claims that a group agrees to respect. We need to use resources. Certain patterns of use within groups develop that benefit everyone. These become more or less formalized as use rights.

Violations of these use rights are considered to be theft. Property rights go beyond use rights to control rights and even rights to the labor of others using the resource, also called income rights. Then transfer rights are added and even the right to destroy a resource that could have been used again in the future. Viewed in this way property rights are surely a form of theft of use rights and a means to make others provide labor outside of mutual aid. In other words, property is theft and slavery. What most people think of as their property rights and a protection against tyranny is really their use rights. And some people by conflating the two, and by the application of force when needed, are able to perpetuate a scam on the rest of us. They claim protection from theft while they are in fact stealing us all blind.

Back to Basics

All living things must use resources from their environment to survive. Some species produce additional resources for use by transforming, organizing, and combining natural or previously produced resources. Some use tools to help in making use of resources. A few species have evolved to rely on mutual aid to be more effective, evolving through a combination of group and individual selection.

Humans for most of our existence lived through hunting and gathering, producing for use, using tools, relying on mutual aid, without rulers or hierarchies. Once agriculture allowed the accumulation of a surplus stored in a particular location, some people figured out how to dominate and exploit others through gaining control of this surplus, becoming rulers.

Rulers initially relied on force and control of narratives to maintain control but have since added other methods, especially money and property. Rulers are basically parasites on the underlying systems of use and mutual aid. Whatever coordination and protection services provided by rulers could be reintegrated into these systems.

If we want to change this situation, we will need to expand the areas where we manage our own activities without rulers. We will also need to convince rulers to give up their ways and come back to us. Needless to say, this will be difficult and involve a long struggle.

Slow Progress

This is not a prescription. It is a prediction, based on history and current conditions. There has been some progress, but we are still far from where we would like to be. The system we want to change is still very strong. It is very good at integrating social change without changing its basic structure. And while many people agree with us, or would if they thought about it, they are not willing to risk what they have.

This is not to let activists off the hook, but it is good to have a realistic view. It is easy to sacrifice more and more of your life and relationships for a course of action with little chance of working, and which may in fact lead to a personal tragedy, out of a sense that you must do something dramatic.

It can be very frustrating to think that no matter what you personally do, you will likely not see the kind of world you hope for in your lifetime. It can be difficult to avoid cycles of frantic action followed by deep disillusionment. But maybe persistent action that is less dramatic might have as good or better results.

There may come a time when dramatic action will be worth the risk, but this will be because of conditions which we cannot control. And to try to force such conditions on others is to contradict the very principles we are trying to promote.

On the other hand, while individually we cannot do much, through mutual aid we together can help improve conditions now and build the structures and practices that can scale up when others decide to join in.

As individuals we can choose to work with projects that we think are taking practical steps in the direction we would like to see, and that we can in some way contribute to, while trying to live our principles in our own lives to the extent possible given our concrete situations.

Peaceful Transition

A society with no rulers where people are free to use resources as needed and where people work together on the basis of mutual aid cannot be forced. Whoever attempted such force would be acting as a ruler. A sudden change to this kind of society would require all the people making the change to freely choose it.

Force can only be justified in self defense when others are attempting to use force on us. So the dynamic is to find spaces where we can be more free and invite others to join us. If others attempt to stop us, self defense may be justified. But it is a delicate balance. Self defense can easily cross over into aggression.

A peaceful transition is greatly preferable, but we need to reconcile ourselves to the fact that it will take time and that we will be working within systems that we do not like. That's just the way it is. We have little choice. Even attempts to withdraw into enclaves cannot be totally pure. We will always need to deal with the people outside.

Here are some ideas for a peaceful transition. In our personal lives, live our values to the extent we can here and now given our concrete situations. In economics, join and support unions and cooperatives where possible and otherwise choose the least damaging economic partners. In culture, respect freedom and support art and discourse that resists the cultural hegemony of rulers. In politics, support increased democracy and policies that reduce government resistance to the kind of society we seek and that take corrective action to mitigate the harm done to people by the current system. In activism, emphasize direct action to make the changes needed and run our organizations consistent with our goals while also putting pressure on politicians by putting their votes at risk through truth telling and winning popular support.

These steps can bring about a transition only if the number of people practicing them increases until enough of society is self managed so that a final transition can happen. This could mean that the rulers have become mere figure heads and we just let self management take over. Or there may be some final crisis where we must defend ourselves against a last stand of the rulers. But in any case, a final transition requires that we know how to run society without rulers, and we have to learn to do that by actual practice. Enough people will join in only after they have seen that self management works.

There has been a dream that the vast majority of people will join a general strike followed by an immediate expropriation of resources and an immediate commencement of self management. There is a remote possibility that this could happen, maybe in some severe crisis. But the most likely result would be just a new set of rulers. Most people don't trust radicals and prefer the evil they know to some unknown evil. So we need to build up self management over time so that people can freely choose it because they see that it works better in actual practice.

No Domination

Domination is forcing the desires of some on others. Domination pervades our society, in our homes, relationships, workplaces, and government. An individual may directly dominate another, but more pervasively we are subjected to systems of domination.

Rulers are those people who dominate either directly or by filling a particular role in a system of domination. So to defend ourselves from domination we need to do more than to just neutralize the activities of particular rulers, we also need to undermine, mitigate, and replace systems of domination.

And this needs to be done in such a way that domination does not in fact get worse. We cannot impose new systems on others. We need to work with others to decide how to change or replace the systems that we all depend on.

To oppose domination is to respect the freedom of other people, to not interfere with their choices including not interfering with their use of the resources they need to act on those choices. It also means to resist the attempts of others to dominate you.

The principle of non-domination can be a unifying moral principle covering much of our individual and political interactions. It is similar to, or maybe even a restatement of, the Golden Rule. To treat others as you would like to be treated means treating the desires of others like your own desires. It means acknowledging an equivalence.

In the area of political interaction, government should be a system of mutual aid that protects us from domination and it should have the needed checks and balances to prevent it from becoming a system of domination.

Unfortunately most of what is put forward as government is in fact a system of domination. We are in the middle of a long struggle to reform or replace what passes for government and to oppose those who want to keep the domination going for their own advantage.

No Money

In order to live we each need the use of resources and the help of others. A society is a group of individuals organized to manage this use and mutual aid. In a society we each have rights and obligations, that is, what we can draw on in terms of the use of resources and help from others and what we are supposed to contribute in terms of our labor or the use of resources that we control. Stated another way, at any point in time we each have credits and debts on our account.

Money is a social technology for managing these credits and debts. It has three main aspects. First, money assigns a numeric value to use values and labor values using a single unit of measure, a monetary unit. Second, money allocates credits and debts to accounts. Third, money allows for the decentralized transfer of credit between accounts to change the balance of credits and debts. So basically money is transferable credit and when we say we have money we mean that we have credit on our account that we can use to draw on the labor of others and the use of resources they control.

Money can be a very useful technology, especially for those who have it. It creates great flexibility and freedom in how use and labor are organized. It allows decision making to be decentralized so that it may seem that once certain rules are in place, it operates automatically, beyond dictatorial control. So in a way money can allow for more freedom.

But there are some deep problems with money. First, there is the problem of how monetary values are assigned to use values and labor values. For example, in modern markets monetary value is assigned based on how the use and labor contributes to profits. Very little consideration is given to meeting human needs. Second, as more of what we need can only be attained if we have money, those without money can literally die for the lack of money. Third, the very abstract nature of money makes it easy to hide where it came from. How you got the money is not as important as the fact that you have the money. This leads to people using all kinds of undesirable ways of getting money, from outright theft and violence to criminal businesses to structuring the monetary system to the benefit of the few. And this just scratches the surface. Money can indeed be the root of at least a lot of evil.

We are so used to money though that it is hard to imagine

alternatives. There were the gift economies of tribal societies and the priestly bureaucracies of ancient city states that existed before money. It is hard to imagine applying those to our technology driven, global economy. But it is possible to imagine alternatives that could accommodate a global technological economy. Here is one possibility. Create a software system for request management. People and work groups can place requests. Rules for assigning priorities to requests are democratically determined. Most likely meeting basic human needs would be given the highest priority since that is in everyone's interest. Everyone who is able would then make a social contribution by meeting these requests in priority order. As long as a person makes their social contribution they are entitled to use the products and services made available. Products and services become social resources like aspects of the natural environment can become natural resources. Use of resources is based on a few principles. Any unused resource can be used. Once a resource is no longer used, it can be used by someone else. Scarce resources are rationed through lottery or rotation or greatest need depending on the resource. Such a system could work without money and with much fewer of the problems associated with money.

For more on money as a social technology, see *Money, The Unauthorized Biography* by Felix Martin.

Also see *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* by David Graeber.

Requests and Use

The purpose of an economy is to meet the needs of the participants in that economy. In order to meet those needs, we need the time of other people to perform tasks and we need the use of resources.

Under the assumption that people are free and cannot be compelled to perform tasks, we can only request their time. So the first element of an economy is request management.

Let us define resources as things in our environment that we use to meet our needs. Under the assumption that people need to consent to perform tasks, people cannot just be used and thus are not resources.

Some resources can be used in an ongoing fashion by many people, perhaps with some work to maintain their usability. Other resources are consumed upon use and more of the resource needs to be produced by nature or by the labor of people.

So the second major element of the economy is use management. Use management interfaces to request management when people are needed to maintain resources or to produce new resources. Beyond this, request management includes services performed directly for other people. Performing requests in turn often requires the use of resources like tools and supplies. This requires an interface to use management.

In our current economy resources are largely controlled by owners and use management is performed by owners. People wishing to use a resource need to get the permission of the owner, often in exchange for money, a resource they own, or some of their time to be controlled by the owner. Using this last mechanism, owners also perform a lot of the request management in the economy. The owners are said to employ people and people work on requests that are in the interest of the owners. Money also tends to become central and becomes a resource of its own.

In a more free economy, request and use management would be controlled more directly by requesters, workers, and resource users through requester councils, worker councils, user councils, time exchanges, cooperatives, use shares, and similar mechanisms.

Money can play a lesser role in such a system, becoming just a measure of hours worked, for example, eliminating the concept of

interest income. Or perhaps money can be eliminated altogether. Effective request management and use management are needed for an economy to function well. Perhaps software could do this directly, without the need for the social technology of money.

The Mess We Are In

While there is evidence that the world population will stabilize at 9-10 billion by around 2100, that is still a lot of people. In order to support that many people we need to keep our levels of productivity up, especially if we hope to allow all these people to have a reasonable standard of living.

In order to manage a world economy of this size that can also pull us back from the brink of ecological collapse with a reasonable hope of a transition to sustainability, we need complex systems of administration. We don't necessarily need the current systems of domination. It is theoretically possible to manage such a complex economy using a system without domination. But unfortunately we don't have enough practical experience and trained people to do this right now. And very few people want to learn. And even if a large enough percentage of the population wanted to learn, we are still held hostage by our dependence on this current economic system that is run how it is run.

Some people who oppose the current system of domination are willing to imagine a collapse back to agrarian or even foraging levels of productivity. They say the ecosystem can't support us and these levels of productivity require domination, so a lot of people are going to have to die and then maybe we can rebuild on a new basis. But this is just too heartless of a plan.

We should oppose domination, but we also need a transition where we and our descendants have a chance to survive. This will involve starting where we are, while remaining very aware of what a trap this can be, how our best intentions can be coopted and corrupted. But what are we to do? Refuse to participate? That can only work if the vast majority will join with us to build a new world within the shell of the old. But they are not joining us. There is no sign that they will. We can wish they would, but here we are.

Politics

All justification chains ultimately end in desire. And my desires are just my desires. As best as I can tell, all the other people around me are in this same situation. None of their desires have any more of a privileged position than mine.

But if I start thinking about how I can pursue my desires, I immediately see that this requires the cooperation of other people and that I am embedded in a social system that has slowly evolved over time. There is no founding social contract. No one designed it. It works, to the extent that it works, just because it has adapted. It is not strictly speaking natural or inevitable. We human beings made it by our choices. But it is not something that is distinct and understandable to the extent that we can just switch it out. We always act within it as we try to change it. We depend on it for organizing our social cooperation and thus for our survival.

Politics is how we operate and try to change this social system as we continue to live within it. After examining a variety of political philosophies and ideologies, I have not found any that are self justifying. There are just conflicts of desires and conflicts over what we consider the best estimate of our situation.

Fortunately, there are some common things that many people desire and would grant to others if they could, like freedom from those who want to force their desires on others and an adequate use of resources to live a decent life. I can only hope that more and more people will do what they can to live more like this, however they put it into words.

Institutions as Declarations

Institutions can be viewed as declarations that if acted on establish status positions, procedures, vocabularies, and rules in some area of human association and cooperation. Institutions live to the extent that individuals accept them and put them into practice. They die to the extent that individuals ignore them and put energy elsewhere.

There are various levels of consequences associated with acting in accordance with, acting against, or ignoring institutions. An institution can be purely voluntary or it can be enforced by disapproval, withdrawal of benefits, or violence. Ideally an institution would live or die to the extent that the voluntary associates of the institution found it useful. More commonly people just get used to institutions and don't want to learn other ways of doing things. Institutions can seem to be natural or even sacred so that deviations seem morally wrong, perverse, or even evil. Or it could be that the people who benefit from status positions in the institutions are just working really hard to keep those positions.

Institutions can be formally defined and declared, but many evolve and are articulated over time. Some we can hardly describe. An individual instance of an institution can involve millions or just two. Institutions can contain other institutions and vast networks of institutions form most of what we think of as society.

Governments, gangs, friendships, money, marriage, clubs, churches, schools, families, dating, living together, the internet, libraries, corporations, neighborhoods, the street, doctors offices, community gardens, police, highways, body image, armies, campsites, stores, buses, restaurants, protests, shows, homes, science are all examples. Our individual identities are largely defined by our roles in institutions. Nonetheless, institutions are always embedded in regions of experience beyond human control and they must ultimately deal at least to some extent with what we call reality.

Institutions are constructs that we declare and act into existence. We can change them, but not easily, because we are so dependent on them, so many people would need to change, and we are caught in their illusions and do not see them clearly.

Systems as Interference

There are several problems with using the distinction between negative and positive freedom to justify greatly different access to resources.

Interference can also be indirect through imposed systems. It is not just whether I personally interfere, while keeping the system we operate in as neutral, as if it is natural. I may benefit by my position in this system. I may consider my benefits as only natural since I did not personally create the system, but this may not be so.

The value of my "contribution" also is not neutral. So if I am greatly rewarded for my hard work at marketing unneeded commodities or manipulating financial instruments, is this contribution really of high value? That depends on the system we operate in.

In a situation in which people are working together on a project that all the participants will benefit from, but some are doing less of the work than others, then this goes against our natural feelings of fairness. But it would be inaccurate to say this is the same situation in a whole economic system where the positions in the system are not the same and everyone does not benefit in the same way. It is a false analogy.

So freedom as not being interfered with may be a good model, but it needs to take into account that the systems we operate in can be a form of interference. It is just harder to see since we as individuals have little control over these systems, so there is a temptation to take them as a given, even as natural.

Meta Desires

If our lives are sequences of language, experience, and desire and justification chains ultimately end in desire, then we are ultimately left with unjustified desires.

In such circumstances it would be useful to have a general policy for what to do when our unjustified desires come into conflict with the unjustified desires of others.

We could try to impose our desires on others through force, trickery, or creating systems that give us an advantage, but eventually the others will rebel and we may not have the power to keep them in check. Also, we may prefer peaceful coexistence rather than constant, and potentially hazardous, conflict.

The opposite approach would be to seek interactions where there are no imposed desires. This will only work if everyone involved voluntarily and sincerely adopts this approach.

There may come a time when this happens and there may be areas of life where we can approach this ideal. We can seek it and promote it. But we also need to deal with those who will still want to impose their desires on others.

One step away from this would be no imposed desires except "no imposed desires". This is similar to no force except in defense against force. It is a somewhat paradoxical approach, but it may be the best we can do.

It does require some care though because we can justify a lot of force in the name of "defense" and it is often not clear when we have crossed the line.

Further, we could define rules for resource use that most people will know and accept in advance. This could range from unlimited private property rights to markets and money to adequate use of resources for all to free use of resources that others are not using.

We could also try to reduce conflicts by defining a set of basic desires and try to make sure that these basic desires are met for all. These could include desires for food, water, shelter, clothing, safety, healthcare, education, and adequate choices beyond this.

What we are defining here are meta desires, like "my desires to the extent of my power", "no rulers", "no rulers, to the extent possible", "no domination", "least domination possible", "maximum freedom for all", "no imposed desires", "my property, my rules", "the market decides", "use not property", "adequate use for all", "free use", and "basic desires met for all", which are themselves just unjustified desires. There does not appear to be a way beyond this.

Political Science

Rulers offer protection, from other rulers, in return for power. This is the basic bargain. The other rulers are often literally rulers of other territories, but they can also be local predators. Laws are intended to define the predatory behaviors of these "criminals" and rulers are intended to enforce these laws.

People soon learn that they need protection from the rulers themselves. Some checks are placed on the rulers. One important one is that the rulers will follow the same laws that they are intended to enforce.

So the rulers will not use their power to steal from the people or to enslave them. But the rulers often break this contract in subtle or obvious ways.

The people having given power to the rulers have the problem of ridding themselves of these "corrupt politicians". They can try to call on other rulers in the system to help. Or they can wait until they have a chance to replace the offending ruler with yet another ruler. And so the cycle continues.

Some people realize that this was a bad bargain to begin with and try to chip away at it. Others fear this chipping away and cling to what protections they have. But everyone is basically trapped by a bargain made long ago that they had no say in.

Dimensions and Labels

In thinking about what I would consider to be progress I have found thinking about the dimensions of domination and property to be useful. I wish that there would be no domination, that is, no rulers of any kind, and I consider property to be a form of domination, not freedom. I see use as the aspect of property that has provided some protection from rulers. Property beyond use though allows such oppressions as rent, interest, and profit, that is, a fictional right to the labor of others without contributing labor in return. So I would abandon the fiction of property and focus on the actual experience of use.

This gets me to no rulers and use, which gives me a lot of affinity with anarchism. In fact, I have come to understand many of these ideas from anarchist literature. In a way I would like to just identify as an anarchist and go from there. But I find there is another political dimension to consider, tactics. There is a lot of diversity of tactics among anarchists, but most would focus only on direct action and exclude elections. Also, there are currents that focus on revolution and the need to destroy our current civilization.

I do see direct action as very useful, but I am skeptical of revolution and destruction. I think it takes time for people to learn new ways and making change voluntary is important to me. I do share a skepticism of partisan politics and I agree that more permanent change will require local voluntary associations linked by broader voluntary federations. However, the state and corporations exist and we have no choice but to deal with them. Tactics here include at least voting and lobbying for checks and balances and harm reduction. For example, at this point in history the state does provide a check on corporations. I realize that this is ultimately just a tactic of some rulers to pacify the population and that these rulers will never abolish their power, although they may reduce some of their power to keep other power. But nonetheless I think this is needed while direct action does its work. So I include a certain amount of electoralism in diversity of tactics like I include unions that put pressure on corporations for concessions. I think each particular tactic needs to be considered in terms of how it works in getting us closer to the ultimate goal of no rulers and use.

This raises some questions then about me identifying as an anarchist. I am a fan of a lot of what anarchists do and I want to help out where I

can and where I find it useful, but I don't always agree on tactics. I also have a lot of affinity with some socialists, but I would have some reservations there as well. Since I am motivated by the idea of progress, which is a good summary word for my approach to tactics, you might think that I would identify as a progressive, but again I have reservations.

I support progress, that is, incremental changes that reduce the power of rulers and that move from an economy based on property to one based on use. I also support progress in science, technology, knowledge, skills, production, ecological sustainability, and a diverse and rich culture. I value civilization and hope it will eventually evolve into a post scarcity civilization with the greatest possible freedom for all.

But progressives it seems to me put too much of an emphasis on government action, that if only the government would do the right things then we would reach our goals. But I continue to see a lot of danger in government action and continue to think that direct action by the people involved is the best approach. I just think that the state can be a potential check on other forms of domination and that we need to influence it when possible towards less harmful actions, that we can't ignore it at this point in history.

A conclusion from this is that at least for me fixed ideologies are not the way to go. It is useful to have some basic vocabulary to start from, but each specific case still needs to be considered in its own terms.

James

Money is a trap, but I do have an account in a small town credit union. My friend Pat lets me use her address for any mail related to it. I increment its numbers from time to time and decrement as little as possible. My constant game is to meet my needs without it as much as I can and to keep my needs small and to owe favors but never numbers.

Work is a trap, but I need some way to increment that aforementioned account. I do jobs but avoid a job. I do keep up some skills that a network of software managers I maintain contact with are willing to exploit. I give them good deliverables at below market rates and they tolerate what they call my eccentricities. Mostly I exchange gifts and favors.

Housing is a trap, but I do inhabit squats and I share rent when someone needs a roommate. I have a go bag that usually has a place if only a locker or behind a friend's couch. I am not afraid to camp out on the streets for a bit. I keep little but a small laptop and a few changes of clothes. Other artifacts stay in their place, not with me. I go to where they are when I need them.

Sex is a trap, but fortunately I am wired a little differently than most. I can take it or leave it, but mostly I leave it. If someone I am sharing a bed with wants something more than a bed companion I sometimes accommodate them. But I don't seek it out or let it rule me.

Ideology is a trap, but I do have my preferences and my ideas and some things I do to further them and some friends I do that with. No rulers and free use. I'll leave it there until I get to know you better.

Identity is a trap, but I do have an official identity for accounts and jobs and such. Otherwise, I go by James. What that means varies by setting. I'm glad to meet you.

Voluntary Contracts

Markets can be described as a spontaneous order generated by voluntary contracts among individuals.

The problem is that the contracts may not be truly voluntary because of the structure of money and property, corporate personhood, externalities, and the lack of common infrastructure and knowledge.

Some claim that not much can be done about these issues because of the complexity of a system that was not designed but evolved by happy accident and that tampering would cause more harm than good because we don't really know enough about these complexities.

Others are more confident and think they can manage markets or at least make some cautious adjustments to the parameters of the system to make it function better. It seems hazardous to trust them. But the problems still remain.

Maybe limits on interest and debt, limits on property not derived from labor and use, more complete allocation of costs in contracts, and adequate insurance would help to reduce to some extent the domination and exploitation built into the system.

If ideas like these were to become common sense among those seeking voluntary contracts the system might adjust itself and property barons and rent seekers might gradually not be able to maintain their privileges.

A difficulty is that the government will likely continue to enforce the original financial and property arrangements and only offer solutions where the government increases its power to manipulate the system without the consent of those seeking voluntary contracts. So we get both the domination of the big property holders and the domination of the government, and truly voluntary contracts remain limited.

Nonetheless, the government can be a check on big property holders, and in the absence of anything better, that may be the best we can get. But maintaining checks on the government should also be a key goal.

Pragmatic Politics

Society evolves organically from many individual choices. We don't really know what the consequences of many of our choices will be because of the complexity of the system. Actually, many of our choices will make little difference unless many other people make the same choices. We are often presented with just a few options, none of which we might find ideal.

So we often can't control our options or know clearly what the consequences of each option will be.

But we nonetheless must choose because doing nothing is also a choice. It seems the best we can do is to understand our options and their consequences the best we can, make our best estimate of which option will get us closer to our preferred situation, and then make adjustments when we see what happens. We should not automatically leave out unconventional options or always take dominant narratives and institutions as given. And we should look closely at the desires driving our choices. Maybe we can get more of what we really want by adjusting them.

Political choices are even more uncertain than choices in our personal lives. We can be fooled by the confident declarations of politicians or our peers. Ideologies can provide a tempting sense of certainty, but it is almost always more complicated than it seems. We know even less about what the consequences might be and we may not be clear on our own true desires. We may get swept up into looking at only a part of the situation and if someone had asked us if we would like some consequence we were not focusing on at the time, we might not have made that choice. And again, the options are even more limited. We don't seem to have any really good choices.

But this is where we are. We must choose within the concrete situations we are actually in.

Summary

Language, experience, and desire.